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THE BOOK

OF

GENESIS

BY

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"FIRST CORINTHIANS", ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CREATION.

GENESIS i. and ii.

IF any one is in search of accurate information regarding the age of this earth, or its relation to the sun, moon, and stars, or regarding the order in which plants and animals have appeared upon it, he is referred to recent text-books in astronomy, geology, and palæontology. No one for a moment dreams of referring a serious student of these subjects to the Bible as a source of information. It is not the object of the writers of Scripture to impart physical instruction or to enlarge the bounds of scientific knowledge. But if any one wishes to know what connection the world has with God, if he seeks to trace back all that now is to the very fountain-head of life, if he desires to discover some unifying principle, some illuminating purpose in the history of this earth, then we confidently refer him to these and the subsequent chapters of Scripture as his safest, and indeed his only, guide to the information he seeks. Every writing must be judged by the object the writer has in view. If the object of the writer of these chapters was to convey physical information, then certainly it is imperfectly fulfilled. But if his object was to give an intelligible account of God's

relation to the world and to man, then it must be owned that he has been successful in the highest degree.

It is therefore unreasonable to allow our reverence for this writing to be lessened because it does not anticipate the discoveries of physical science; or to repudiate its authority in its own department of truth because it does not give us information which it formed no part of the writer's object to give. As well might we deny to Shakespeare a masterly knowledge of human life, because his dramas are blotted by historical anachronisms. That the compiler of this book of Genesis did not aim at scientific accuracy in speaking of physical details is obvious, not merely from the general scope and purpose of the Biblical writers, but especially from this, that in these first two chapters of his book he lays side by side two accounts of man's creation which no ingenuity can reconcile. These two accounts, glaringly incompatible in details, but absolutely harmonious in their leading ideas, at once warn the reader that the writer's aim is rather to convey certain ideas regarding man's spiritual history and his connection with God, than to describe the process of creation. He does describe the process of creation, but he describes it only for the sake of the ideas regarding man's relation to God and God's relation to the world which he can thereby convey. Indeed what we mean by scientific knowledge was not in all the thoughts of the people for whom this book was written. The subject of creation, of the beginning of man upon earth, was not approached from that side at all; and if we are to understand what is here written we must burst the trammels of our own modes of thought and read these chapters not as a chronological, astronomical,

geological, biological statement, but as a moral or spiritual conception.

It will, however, be said, and with much appearance of justice, that although the first object of the writer was not to convey scientific information, yet he might have been expected to be accurate in the information he did advance regarding the physical universe. This is an enormous assumption to make on *à priori* grounds, but it is an assumption worth seriously considering because it brings into view a real and important difficulty which every reader of Genesis must face. It brings into view the twofold character of this account of creation. On the one hand it is irreconcilable with the teachings of science. On the other hand it is in striking contrast to the other cosmogonies which have been handed down from pre-scientific ages. These are the two patent features of this record of creation and both require to be accounted for. Either feature alone would be easily accounted for; but the two co-existing in the same document are more baffling. We have to account at once for a want of perfect coincidence with the teachings of science, and for a singular freedom from those errors which disfigure all other primitive accounts of the creation of the world. The one feature of the document is as patent as the other and presses equally for explanation.

Now many persons cut the knot by simply denying that both these features exist. There is no disagreement with science, they say. I speak for many careful enquirers when I say that this cannot serve as a solution of the difficulty. I think it is to be freely admitted that, from whatever cause and however justifiably, the account of creation here given is not in strict and detailed accordance with the teaching of

science. All attempts to force its statements into such accord are futile and mischievous. They are futile because they do not convince independent enquirers, but only those who are unduly anxious to be convinced. And they are mischievous because they unduly prolong the strife between Scripture and science, putting the question on a false issue. And above all, they are to be condemned because they do violence to Scripture, foster a style of interpretation by which the text is forced to say whatever the interpreter desires, and prevent us from recognising the real nature of these sacred writings. The Bible needs no defence such as false constructions of its language bring to its aid. They are its worst friends who distort its words that they may yield a meaning more in accordance with scientific truth. If, for example, the word 'day' in these chapters, does not mean a period of twenty-four hours, the interpretation of Scripture is hopeless. Indeed if we are to bring these chapters into any comparison at all with science, we find at once various discrepancies. Of a creation of sun, moon, and stars, subsequent to the creation of this earth, science can have but one thing to say. Of the existence of fruit trees prior to the existence of the sun, science knows nothing. But for a candid and unsophisticated reader without a special theory to maintain, details are needless.

Accepting this chapter then as it stands, and believing that only by looking at the Bible as it actually is can we hope to understand God's method of revealing Himself, we at once perceive that ignorance of some departments of truth does not disqualify a man for knowing and imparting truth about God. In order to be a medium of revelation a man does not need to be in advance of

his age in secular learning. Intimate communion with God, a spirit trained to discern spiritual things, a perfect understanding of and zeal for God's purpose, these are qualities quite independent of a knowledge of the discoveries of science. The enlightenment which enables men to apprehend God and spiritual truth, has no necessary connection with scientific attainments. David's confidence in God and his declarations of His faithfulness are none the less valuable, because he was ignorant of a very great deal which every school-boy now knows. Had inspired men introduced into their writings information which anticipated the discoveries of science, their state of mind would be inconceivable, and revelation would be a source of confusion. God's methods are harmonious with one another, and as He has given men natural faculties to acquire scientific knowledge and historical information, He did not stultify this gift by imparting such knowledge in a miraculous and unintelligible manner. There is no evidence that inspired men were in advance of their age in the knowledge of physical facts and laws. And plainly, had they been supernaturally instructed in physical knowledge they would so far have been unintelligible to those to whom they spoke. Had the writer of this book mingled with his teaching regarding God, an explicit and exact account of how this world came into existence—had he spoken of millions of years instead of speaking of days—in all probability he would have been discredited, and what he had to say about God would have been rejected along with his premature science. But speaking from the point of view of his contemporaries, and accepting the current ideas regarding the formation of the world, he attached to these the views regarding God's connection with the world which

are most necessary to be believed. What he had learned of God's unity and creative power and connection with man, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he imparts to his contemporaries through the vehicle of an account of creation they could all understand. It is not in his knowledge of physical facts that he is elevated above his contemporaries, but in his knowledge of God's connection with all physical facts. No doubt, on the other hand, his knowledge of God reacts upon the entire contents of his mind and saves him from presenting such accounts of creation as have been common among polytheists. He presents an account purified by his conception of what was worthy of the supreme God he worshipped. His idea of God has given dignity and simplicity to all he says about creation, and there is an elevation and majesty about the whole conception, which we recognise as the reflex of his conception of God.

Here then instead of anything to discompose us or to excite unbelief, we recognise one great law or principle on which God proceeds in making Himself known to men. This has been called the Law of Accommodation. It is the law which requires that the condition and capacity of those to whom the revelation is made must be considered. If you wish to instruct a child, you must speak in language the child can understand. If you wish to elevate a savage, you must do it by degrees, accommodating yourself to his condition, and winking at much ignorance while you instil elementary knowledge. You must found all you teach on what is already understood by your pupil, and through that you must convey further knowledge and train his faculties to higher capacity. So was it with God's revelation. The Jews were children who had to be

trained with what Paul somewhat contemptuously calls "weak and beggarly elements," the A B C of morals and religion. Not even in morals could the absolute truth be enforced. Accommodation had to be practised even here. Polygamy was allowed as a concession to their immature stage of development: and practices in war and in domestic law were permitted or enjoined which were inconsistent with absolute morality. Indeed the whole Jewish system was an adaptation to an immature state. The dwelling of God in the Temple as a man in his house, the propitiating of God with sacrifice as of an Eastern king with gifts; this was a teaching by picture, a teaching which had as much resemblance to the truth and as much mixture of truth as they were able then to receive. No doubt this teaching did actually mislead them in some of their ideas; but it kept them on the whole in a right attitude towards God, and prepared them for growing up to a fuller discernment of the truth.

Much more was this law observed in regard to such matters as are dealt with in these chapters. It was impossible that in their ignorance of the rudiments of scientific knowledge, the early Hebrews should understand an absolutely accurate account of how the world came into being; and if they could have understood it, it would have been useless, dissevered as it must have been from the steps of knowledge by which men have since arrived at it. Children ask us questions in answer to which we do not tell them the exact full truth, because we know they cannot possibly understand it. All that we can do is to give them some provisional answer which conveys to them some information they can understand, and which keeps them in a right state of mind, although this information

often seems absurd enough when compared with the actual facts and truth of the matter. And if some solemn pedant accused us of supplying the child with false information, we would simply tell him he knew nothing about children. Accurate information on these matters will infallibly come to the child when he grows up; what is wanted meanwhile is to give him information which will help to form his conduct without gravely misleading him as to facts. Similarly, if any one tells me he cannot accept these chapters as inspired by God, because they do not convey scientifically accurate information regarding this earth, I can only say that he has yet to learn the first principles of revelation, and that he misunderstands the conditions on which all instruction must be given.

My belief then is, that in these chapters we have the ideas regarding the origin of the world and of man which were naturally attainable in the country where they were first composed, but with those important modifications which a monotheistic belief necessarily suggested. So far as merely physical knowledge went, there is probably little here that was new to the contemporaries of the writer; but this already familiar knowledge was used by him as the vehicle for conveying his faith in the unity, love and wisdom of God the creator. He laid a firm foundation for the history of God's relation to man. This was his object, and this he accomplished. The Bible is the book to which we turn for information regarding the history of God's revelation of Himself, and of His will towards men; and in these chapters we have the suitable introduction to this history. No changes in our knowledge of physical truth can at all affect the teaching of these chapters. What they teach regarding the relation of man to God

is independent of the physical details in which this teaching is embodied, and can as easily be attached to the most modern statement of the physical origin of the world and of man.

What then are the truths taught us in these chapters? The first is that there has been a creation, that things now existing have not just grown of themselves, but have been called into being by a presiding intelligence and an originating will. No attempt to account for the existence of the world in any other way has been successful. A great deal has in this generation been added to our knowledge of the efficiency of material causes to produce what we see around us; but when we ask what gives harmony to these material causes, and what guides them to the production of certain ends, and what originally produced them, the answer must still be, not matter but intelligence and purpose. The best informed and most penetrating minds of our time affirm this. John Stuart Mill says: "It must be allowed that in the present state of our knowledge the adaptations in nature afford a large balance of probability in favour of creation by intelligence." Professor Tyndall adds his testimony and says: "I have noticed during years of self-observation that it is not in hours of clearness and vigour that [the doctrine of material atheism] commends itself to my mind—that in the hours of stronger and healthier thought it ever dissolves and disappears, as offering no solution of the mystery in which we dwell and of which we form a part."

There is indeed a prevalent suspicion, that in presence of the discoveries made by evolutionists the argument from design is no longer tenable. Evolution shows us that the correspondence of the structure of animals,

with their modes of life, has been generated by the nature of the case; and it is concluded that a blind mechanical necessity and not an intelligent design rules all. But the discovery of the process by which the presently existing living forms have been evolved, and the perception that this process is governed by laws which have always been operating, do not make intelligence and design at all less necessary, but rather more so. As Professor Huxley himself says: "The teleological and mechanical views of nature are not necessarily exclusive. The teleologist can always defy the evolutionist to disprove that the primordial molecular arrangement was not intended to evolve the phenomena of the universe." Evolution, in short, by disclosing to us the marvellous power and accuracy of natural law, compels us more emphatically than ever to refer all law to a supreme, originating intelligence.

This then is the first lesson of the Bible; that at the root and origin of all this vast material universe, before whose laws we are crushed as the moth, there abides a living conscious Spirit, who wills and knows and fashions all things. The belief of this changes for us the whole face of nature, and instead of a chill, impersonal world of forces to which no appeal can be made, and in which matter is supreme, gives us the home of a Father. If you are yourself but a particle of a huge and unconscious universe—a particle which, like a flake of foam, or a drop of rain, or a gnat, or a beetle, lasts its brief space and then yields up its substance to be moulded into some new creature; if there is no power that understands you and sympathizes with you and makes provision for your instincts, your aspirations, your capabilities; if man is himself the highest intelligence, and if all things are the purposeless result

of physical forces; if, in short, there is no God, no consciousness at the beginning as at the end of all things, then nothing can be more melancholy than our position. Our higher desires which seem to separate us so immeasurably from the brutes, we have, only that they may be cut down by the keen edge of time, and wither in barren disappointment; our reason we have, only to enable us to see and measure the brevity of our span, and so live our little day, not joyously as the unforeseeing beasts, but shadowed by the hastening gloom of anticipated, inevitable and everlasting night; our faculty for worshipping and for striving to serve and to resemble the perfect living One, that faculty which seems to be the thing of greatest promise and of finest quality in us, and to which is certainly due the largest part of what is admirable and profitable in human history, is the most mocking and foolishest of all our parts. But, God be thanked, He has revealed himself to us; has given us in the harmonious and progressive movement of all around us, sufficient indication that, even in the material world, intelligence and purpose reign; an indication which becomes immensely clearer as we pass into the world of man; and which, in presence of the person and life of Christ attains the brightness of a conviction which illuminates all besides.

The other great truth which this writer teaches is, that man was the chief work of God, for whose sake all else was brought into being. The work of creation was not finished till he appeared: all else was preparatory to this final product. That man is the crown and lord of this earth is obvious. Man instinctively assumes that all else has been made for him, and freely acts upon this assumption. But when our eyes are lifted from this little ball on which we are set and to which

we are confined, and when we scan such other parts of the universe as are within our ken, a keen sense of littleness oppresses us; our earth is after all so minute and apparently inconsiderable a point when compared with the vast suns and planets that stretch system on system into illimitable space. When we read even the rudiments of what astronomers have discovered regarding the inconceivable vastness of the universe, the huge dimensions of the heavenly bodies, and the grand scale on which everything is framed, we find rising to our lips, and with tenfold reason, the words of David: "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers; the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?" Is it conceivable that on this scarcely discernible speck in the vastness of the universe, should be played out the chiefest act in the history of God? Is it credible that He whose care it is to uphold this illimitable universe, should be free to think of the wants and woes of the insignificant creatures who quickly spend their little lives in this inconsiderable earth?

But reason seems all on the side of Genesis. God must not be considered as sitting apart in a remote position of general superintendence, but as present with all that is. And to Him who maintains these systems in their respective relations and orbits, it can be no burden to relieve the needs of individuals. To think of ourselves as too insignificant to be attended to is to derogate from God's true majesty and to misunderstand His relation to the world. But it is also to misapprehend the real value of spirit as compared with matter. Man is dear to God because he is like Him. Vast and glorious as it is, the sun cannot think God's thoughts;

can fulfil but cannot intelligently sympathize with God's purpose. Man, alone among God's works, can enter into and approve of God's purpose in the world and can intelligently fulfil it. Without man the whole material universe would have been dark and unintelligible, mechanical and apparently without any sufficient purpose. Matter, however fearfully and wonderfully wrought, is but the platform and material in which spirit, intelligence and will, may fulfil themselves and find development. Man is incommensurable with the rest of the universe. He is of a different kind and by his moral nature is more akin to God than to His works.

Here the beginning and the end of God's revelation join hands and throw light on one another. The nature of man was that in which God was at last to give His crowning revelation, and for that no preparation could seem extravagant. Fascinating and full of marvel as is the history of the past which science discloses to us; full as these slow-moving millions of years are in evidences of the exhaustless wealth of nature, and mysterious as the delay appears, all that expenditure of resources is eclipsed and all the delay justified when the whole work is crowned by the Incarnation, for in it we see that all that slow process was the preparation of a nature in which God could manifest Himself as a Person to persons. This is seen to be an end worthy of all that is contained in the physical history of the world: this gives completeness to the whole and makes it a unity. No higher, other end need be sought, none could be conceived. It is this which seems worthy of those tremendous and subtle forces which have been set at work in the physical world, this which justifies the long lapse of ages filled with wonders unobserved, and teeming with ever new life,

this above all which justifies these latter ages in which all physical marvels have been outdone by the tragical history of man upon earth. Remove the Incarnation and all remains dark, purposeless, unintelligible: grant the Incarnation, believe that in Jesus Christ the Supreme manifested Himself personally, and light is shed upon all that has been and is.

Light is shed on the individual life. Are you living as if you were the product of blind mechanical laws, and as if there were no object worthy of your life and of all the force you can throw into your life? Consider the Incarnation of the Creator, and ask yourself if sufficient object is not given to you in His call that you be conformed to His image and become the intelligent executor of His purposes? Is life not worth having even on these terms? The man that can still sit down and bemoan himself as if there were no meaning in existence, or lounge languidly through life as if there were no zest or urgency in living, or try to satisfy himself with fleshly comforts, has surely need to turn to the opening page of Revelation and learn that God saw sufficient object in the life of man, enough to compensate for millions of ages of preparation. If it is possible that you should share in the character and destiny of Christ, can a healthy ambition crave anything more or higher? If the future is to be as momentous in results as the past has certainly been filled with preparation, have you no caring to share in these results? Believe that there is a purpose in things; that in Christ, the revelation of God, you can see what that purpose is, and that by wholly uniting yourself to Him and allowing yourself to be penetrated by His Spirit you can participate with Him in the working out of that purpose.

II.

THE FALL.

GENESIS III.

PROFOUND as the teaching of this narrative is, its meaning does not lie on the surface. Literal interpretation will reach a measure of its significance, but plainly there is more here than appears in the letter. When we read that the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, and that he tempted the woman, we at once perceive that it is not with the outer husk of the story we are to concern ourselves, but with the kernel. The narrative throughout speaks of nothing but the brute serpent; not a word is said of the devil, not the slightest hint is given that the machinations of a fallen angel are signified. The serpent is compared to the other beasts of the field, showing that it is the brute serpent that is spoken of. The curse is pronounced on the beast, not on a fallen spirit summoned for the purpose before the Supreme; and not in terms which could apply to a fallen spirit, but in terms that are applicable only to the serpent that crawls. Yet every reader feels that this is not the whole mystery of the fall of man: moral evil cannot be accounted for by referring it to a brute source. No one, I suppose, believes that the whole tribe of serpents crawl as a punishment of an offence

committed by one of their number, or that the whole iniquity and sorrow of the world are due to an actual serpent. Plainly this is merely a pictorial representation intended to convey some general impressions and ideas. Vitally important truths underlie the narrative and are bodied forth by it; but the way to reach these truths is not to adhere too rigidly to the literal meaning, but to catch the general impression which it seems fitted to make.

No doubt this opens the door to a great variety of interpretation. No two men will attach to it precisely the same meaning. One says, the serpent is a symbol for Satan, but Adam and Eve are historical persons. Another says, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a figure, but the driving out from the garden is real. Another maintains that the whole is a picture, putting in a visible, intelligible shape certain vitally important truths regarding the history of our race. So that every man is left very much to his own judgment, to read the narrative candidly and in such light from other sources as he has, and let it make its own impression upon him. This would be a sad resnlt if the object of the Bible were to bring us all to a rigid uniformity of belief in all matters; but the object of the Bible is not that, but the far higher object of furnishing all varieties of men with sufficient light to lead them to God. And this being so, variety of interpretation in details is not to be lamented. The very purpose of such representations as are here given is to suit all stages of mental and spiritual advancement. Let the child read it and he will learn what will live in his mind and influence him all his life. Let the devout man who has ranged through all science and history and philosophy come back to this narrative, and he feels that he has here

the essential truth regarding the beginnings of man's tragical career upon earth.

We should, in my opinion, be labouring under a misapprehension if we supposed that none even of the earliest readers of this account saw the deeper meaning of it. When men who felt the misery of sin and lifted up their hearts to God for deliverance, read the words addressed to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"—is it reasonable to suppose that such men would take these words in their literal sense, and satisfy themselves with the assurance that serpents, though dangerous, would be kept under, and would find in the words no assurance of that very thing they themselves were all their lifetime striving after, deliverance from the evil thing which lay at the root of all sin? No doubt some would accept the story in its literal meaning,—shallow and careless men whose own spiritual experience never urged them to see any spiritual significance in the words would do so; but even those who saw least in the story, and put a very shallow interpretation on its details, could scarcely fail to see its main teaching.

The reader of this perennially fresh story is first of all struck with the account given of man's primitive condition. Coming to this narrative with our minds coloured by the fancies of poets and philosophers, we are almost startled by the check which the plain and sober statements of this account give to an unpruned fancy. We have to read the words again and again to make sure we have not omitted something which gives support to those glowing descriptions of man's primitive condition. Certainly he is described as innocent

and at peace with God, and in this respect no terms can exaggerate his happiness. But in other respects the language of the Bible is surprisingly moderate. Man is represented as living on fruit, and as going unclothed, and, so far as appears, without any artificial shelter either from the heat of the sun or the cold of night. None of the arts were as yet known. All working of metals had yet to be discovered, so that his tools must have been of the rudest possible description; and the arts, such as music, which adorn life and make leisure enjoyable, were also still in the future.

But the most significant elements in man's primitive condition are represented by the two trees of the garden; by trees, because with plants alone he had to do. In the centre of the garden stood the tree of life, the fruit of which bestowed immortality. Man was therefore naturally mortal, though apparently with a capacity for immortality. How this capacity would have actually carried man on to immortality had he not sinned, it is vain to conjecture. The mystical nature of the tree of life is fully recognised in the New Testament, by our Lord, when He says: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God;" and by John, when he describes the new Jerusalem: "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Both these representations are intended to convey, in a striking and pictorial form, the promise of life everlasting.

And as of the tree of life which stands in the Paradise of the future it is said "Blessed are they that do His

commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life;" so in Eden man's immortality was suspended on the condition of obedience. And the trial of man's obedience is imaged in the other tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From the child-like innocence in which man originally was, he was to pass forward into the condition of moral manhood, which consists not in mere innocence, but in innocence maintained in presence of temptation. The savage is innocent of many of the crimes of civilized men because he has no opportunity to commit them; the child is innocent of some of the vices of manhood because he has no temptation to them. But this innocence is the result of circumstance, not of character; and if savage or child is to become a mature moral being he must be tried by altered circumstances, by temptation and opportunity. To carry man forward to this higher stage trial is necessary, and this trial is indicated by the tree of knowledge. The fruit of this tree is prohibited, to indicate that it is only in presence of what is forbidden man can be morally tested, and that it is only by self-command and obedience to law, and not by the mere following of instincts, that man can attain to moral maturity. The prohibition is that which makes him recognise a distinction between good and evil. He is put in a position in which good is not the only thing he can do; an alternative is present to his mind, and the choice of good in preference to evil is made possible to him. In presence of this tree child-like innocence was no longer possible. The self-determination of manhood was constantly required. Conscience, hitherto latent, was now evoked and took its place as man's supreme faculty.

It is in vain to think of exhausting this narrative

We can, at the most, only remark upon some of the most salient points.

(1) Temptation comes like a serpent; like the most subtile beast of the field; like that one creature which is said to exert a fascinating influence on its victims, fastening them with its glittering eye, stealing upon them by its noiseless, low and unseen approach, perplexing them by its wide circling folds, seeming to come upon them from all sides at once, and armed not like the other beasts with one weapon of offence—horn, or hoof, or teeth—but capable of crushing its victim with every part of its sinuous length. It lies apparently dead for months together, but when roused it can, as the naturalist tells us, "outclimb the monkey, outswim the fish, outleap the zebra, outwrestle the athlete, and crush the tiger." How naturally in describing temptation do we borrow language from the aspect and movements of this creature. It does not need to hunt down its victims by long continued pursuit, its victims come and put themselves within its reach. Unseen, temptation lies by our path, and before we have time to think we are fascinated and bewildered, its coils rapidly gather round us and its stroke flashes poison through our blood. Against sin, when once it has wreathed itself around us, we seem helpless to contend; the very powers with which we could resist are benumbed or pinned useless to our side—our foe seems all round us, and to extricate one part is but to become entangled in another. As the serpent finds its way everywhere, over every fence or barrier, into every corner and recess, so it is impossible to keep temptation out of the life; it appears where least we expect it and when we think ourselves secure.

(2) Temptation succeeds at first by exciting our

curiosity. It is a wise saying that "our great security against sin lies in being shocked at it. Eve gazed and reflected when she should have fled." The serpent created an interest, excited her curiosity about this forbidden fruit. And as this excited curiosity lies near the beginning of sin in the race, so does it in the individual. I suppose if you trace back the mystery of iniquity in your own life and seek to track it to its source, you will find it to have originated in this craving to taste evil. No man originally meant to become the sinner he has become. He only intended, like Eve, to taste. It was a voyage of discovery he meant to make; he did not think to get nipped and frozen up and never more return from the outer cold and darkness. He wished before finally giving himself to virtue, to see the real value of the other alternative.

This dangerous craving has many elements in it. There is in it the instinctive drawing towards what is mysterious. One veiled figure in an assembly will attract more scrutiny than the most admired beauty. An appearance in the heavens that no one can account for will nightly draw more eyes than the most wonderful sunset. To lift veils, to penetrate disguises, to unravel complicated plots, to solve mysteries, this is always inviting to the human mind. The tale which used to thrill us in childhood, of the one locked room, the one forbidden key, bears in it a truth for men as well as for children. What is hidden must, we conclude, have some interest for us—else why hide it from us? What is forbidden must have some important bearing upon us. Else why forbid it? Things which are indifferent to us are left in our way, obvious, and without concealment. But as action has been taken regarding the things that are forbidden, action in view

of our relation to them, it is natural to us to desire to know what these things are and how they affect us.

There is added to this in young persons, a sense of incompleteness. They wish to be grown up. Few boys wish to be always boys. They long for the signs of manhood, and seek to possess that knowledge of life and its ways which they very much identify with manhood. But too commonly they mistake the path to manhood. They feel as if they had a wider range of liberty and were more thoroughly men when they transgress the limits assigned by conscience. They feel as if there were a new and brighter world outside that which is fenced round by strict morality, and they tremble with excitement on its borders. It is a fatal delusion. Only by choosing the good in presence of the evil are true manhood and real maturity gained. True manliness consists mainly in self control, in a patient waiting upon nature and God's law and when youth impatiently breaks through the protecting fence of God's law, and seeks growth by knowing evil, it misses that very advancement it seeks, and cheats itself out of the manhood it apes.

(3) Through this craving for an enlarged experience unbelief in God's goodness finds entrance. In the presence of forbidden pleasure we are tempted to feel as if God were grudging us enjoyment. The very arguments of the serpent occur to our mind. No harm will come of our indulging; the prohibition is needless, unreasonable and unkind; it is not based on any genuine desire for our welfare. This fence that shuts us out from knowing good and evil is erected by a timorous asceticism, by a ridiculous misconception of what truly enlarges human nature; it shuts us into a poor narrow life. And thus suspicions of God's perfect wisdom and

goodness find entrance; we begin to think we know better than He what is good for us, and can contrive a richer, happier life than He has provided for us. Our loyalty to Him is loosened, and already we have lost hold of His strength and are launched on the current that leads to sin, misery, and shame. When we find ourselves saying Yes, where God has said No; when we see desirable things where God has said there is death; when we allow distrust of Him to rankle in our mind, when we chafe against the restrictions under which we live and seek liberty by breaking down the fence instead of by delighting in God, we are on the highway to all evil.

(4) If we know our own history we cannot be surprised to read that one taste of evil ruined our first parents. It is so always. The one taste alters our attitude towards God and conscience and life. It is a veritable Circe's cup. The actual experience of sin is like the one taste of alcohol to a reclaimed drunkard, like the first taste of blood to a young tiger, it calls out the latent devil and creates a new nature within us. At one brush it wipes out all the peace, and joy, and self-respect, and boldness of innocence, and numbers us among the transgressors, among the shame-faced, and self-despising, and hopeless. It leaves us possessed with unhappy thoughts which lead us away from what is bright, and honourable, and good, and like the letting out of water it seems to have tapped a spring of evil within us. It is but one step, but it is like the step over a precipice or down the shaft of a mine; it cannot be taken back, it commits to an altogether different state of things.

(5) The first result of sin is shame. The form in which the knowledge of good and evil comes to us is

the knowing we are naked, the consciousness that we are stripped of all that made us walk unabashed before God and men. The promise of the serpent while broken in the sense is fulfilled to the ear; the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened and they knew that they were naked. Self-reflection begins, and the first movement of conscience produces shame. Had they resisted temptation, conscience would have been born but not in self-condemnation. Like children they had hitherto been conscious only of what was external to themselves, but now their consciousness of a power to choose good and evil is awakened and its first exercise is accompanied with shame. They feel that in themselves they are faulty, that they are not in themselves complete; that though created by God, they are not fit for His eye. The lower animals wear no clothes because they have no knowledge of good and evil; children feel no need of covering because as yet self-consciousness is latent, and their conduct is determined for them; those who are re-made in the image of God and glorified as Christ is, cannot be thought of as clothed, for in them there is no sense of sin. But Adam's clothing himself and hiding himself were the helpless attempts of a guilty conscience to evade the judgment of truth.

(6) But when Adam found he was no longer fit for God's eye, God provided a covering which might enable him again to live in His presence without dismay. Man had exhausted his own ingenuity and resources, and exhausted them without finding relief to his shame. If his shame was to be effectually removed, God must do it. And the clothing in coats of skins indicates the restoration of man, not indeed to pristine innocence, but to peace with God. Adam felt that God did not wish to banish him lastingly from His presence, nor to

see him always a trembling and confused penitent. The self-respect and progressiveness, the reverence for law and order and God, which came in with clothes, and which we associate with the civilised races, were accepted as tokens that God was desirous to co-operate with man, to forward and further him in all good.

It is also to be remarked that the clothing which God provided was in itself different from what man had thought of. Adam took leaves from an inanimate, unfeeling tree; God deprived an animal of life, that the shame of His creature might be relieved. This was the last thing Adam would have thought of doing. To us life is cheap and death familiar, but Adam recognised death as the punishment of sin. Death was to early man a sign of God's anger. And he had to learn that sin could be covered not by a bunch of leaves snatched from a bush as he passed by and that would grow again next year, but only by pain and blood. Sin cannot be atoned for by any mechanical action nor without expenditure of feeling. Suffering must ever follow wrongdoing. From the first sin to the last, the track of the sinner is marked with blood. Once we have sinned we cannot regain permanent peace of conscience save through pain, and this not only pain of our own. The first hint of this was given as soon as conscience was aroused in man. It was made apparent that sin was a real and deep evil, and that by no easy and cheap process could the sinner be restored. The same lesson has been written on millions of consciences since. Men have found that their sin reaches beyond their own life and person, that it inflicts injury and involves disturbance and distress, that it changes utterly our relation to life and to God, and that we cannot rise above its consequences save by the intervention of God Him-

self, by an intervention which tells us of the sorrow He suffers on our account.

For the chief point is that it is God who relieves man's shame. Until we are certified that God desires our peace of mind we cannot be at peace. The cross of Christ is the permanent witness to this desire on God's part. No one can read what Christ has done for us without feeling sure that for himself there is a way back to God from all sin—that it is God's desire that his sin should be covered, his iniquity forgiven. Too often that which seems of prime importance to God seems of very slight importance to us. To have our life founded solidly in harmony with the Supreme, seems often to excite no desire within us. It is about sin we find man first dealing with God, and until you have satisfied God and yourself regarding this prime and fundamental matter of your own transgression and wrong-doing you look in vain for any deep and lasting growth and satisfaction. Have you no reason to be ashamed before God? Have you loved Him in any proportion to His worthiness to be loved? Have you cordially and habitually fallen in with His will? Have you zealously done His work in the world? Have you fallen short of no good He intended you should do and gave you opportunity to do? Is there no reason for shame on your part before God? Has His desire to cover sin no application to you? Can you not understand His meaning when He comes to you with offers of pardon and acts of oblivion? Surely the candid mind, the clear-judging conscience can be at no loss to explain God's solicitous concern for the sinner; and must humbly own that even that unfathomable Divine emotion which is exhibited in the cross of Christ, is no exaggerated and theatrical demonstration, but the

actual carrying through of what was really needed for the restoration of the sinner. Do not live as if the cross of Christ had never been, or as if you had never sinned and had no connection with it. Strive to learn what it means; strive to deal fairly with it and fairly with your own transgressions and with your present actual relation to God and His will.

III.

CAIN AND ABEL.

Genesis iv.

IT is not the purpose of this narrator to write the history of the world. It is not his purpose to write even the history of mankind. His object is to write the history of redemption. Starting from the broad fact of man's alienation from God, he means to trace that element in human history which results in the perfect re-union of God and man. The key-note has been struck in the promise already given that the seed of the woman should prevail over the seed of the serpent, that the effects of man's voluntary dissociation from God should be removed. It is the fulfilment of this promise which is traced by this writer. He steadily pursues that one line of history which runs directly towards this fulfilment; turning aside now and again to pursue, to a greater or less distance, diverging lines, but always returning to the grand highway on which the promise travels. His method is first to dispose of collateral matter and then to proceed with his main theme. As here, he first disposes of the line of Cain and then returns to Seth through whom the line of promise is maintained.

The first thing we have to do with outside the garden is death—the curse of sin speedily manifests itself in

its most terrible form. But the sinner executes it himself. The first death is a murder. As if to show that all death is a wrong inflicted on us and proceeds not from God but from sin, it is inflicted by sin and by the hand of man. Man becomes his own executioner, and takes part with Satan, the murderer from the beginning. But certainly the first feeling produced by these events must have been one of bitter disappointment, as if the promise were to be lost in the curse.

The story of Cain and Abel was to all appearance told in order to point out that from the very first men have been divided into two great classes, viewed in connection with God's promise and presence in the world. Always there have been those who believed in God's love and waited for it, and those who believed more in their own force and energy. Always there have been the humble and self-diffident who hoped in God, and the proud and self-reliant who felt themselves equal to all the occasions of life. And this story of Cain and Abel and the succeeding generations does not conceal the fact, that for the purposes of this world there has been visible an element of weakness in the godly line, and that it is to the self-reliant and God-defying energy of the descendants of Cain that we owe much of the external civilisation of the world. While the descendants of Seth pass away and leave only this record, that they "walked with God," there are found among Cain's descendants, builders of cities, inventors of tools and weapons, music and poetry and the beginnings of culture.

These two opposed lines are in the first instance represented by Cain and Abel. With each child that comes into the world some fresh hope is brought; and the name of Cain points to the expectation of his

parents that in him a fresh start would be made. Alas! as the boy grew they saw how vain such expectation was and how truly their nature had passed into his, and how no imparted experience of theirs, taught him from without, could countervail the strong propensities to evil which impelled him from within. They experienced that bitterest punishment which parents undergo, when they see their own defects and infirmities and evil passions repeated in their children and leading them astray as they once led themselves; when in those who are to perpetuate their name and remembrance on earth they see evidence that their faults also will be perpetuated; when in those whom they chiefly love they have a mirror ceaselessly held up to them forcing them to remember the follies and sins of their own youth. Certainly in the proud, self-willed, sullen Cain no redemption was to be found.

Both sons own the necessity of labour. Man is no longer in the primitive condition, in which he had only to stretch out his hand when hungry, and satisfy his appetite. There are still some regions of the earth in which the trees shower fruit, nutritious and easily preserved, on men who shun labour. Were this the case throughout the world, the whole of life would be changed. Had we been created self-sufficing or in such conditions as involved no necessity of toil, nothing would be as it now is. It is the need of labour that implies occasional starvation and frequent poverty, and gives occasion to charity. It is the need of labour which involves commerce and thereby sows the seed of greed, worldliness, ambition, drudgery. The ultimate physical wants of men, food and clothes, are the motive of the greater part of all human activity. Trace to their causes the various industries of men, the wars, the great social

movements, all that constitutes history, and you find that the bulk of all that is done upon earth is done because men must have food and wish to have it as good and with as little labour as possible. The broad facts of human life are in many respects humiliating.

The disposition of men is consequently shown in the occupations they choose and the idea of life they carry into them. Some, like Abel, choose peaceful callings that draw out feeling and sympathy; others prefer pursuits which are stirring and active. Cain chose the tillage of the ground, partly no doubt from the necessity of the case, but probably also with the feeling that he could subdue nature to his own purposes notwithstanding the curse that lay upon it. Do we not all sometimes feel a desire to take the world as it is, curse and all, and make the most of it; to face its disease with human skill, its disturbing and destructive elements with human forethought and courage, its sterility and stubbornness with human energy and patience? What is stimulating men still to all discovery and invention, to forewarn seamen of coming storms, to break a precarious passage for commerce through eternal ice or through malarious swamps, to make life at all points easier and more secure? Is it not the energy which opposition excites? We know that it will be hard work; we expect to have thorns and thistles everywhere, but let us see whether this may not after all be a thoroughly happy world, whether we cannot cultivate the curse altogether out of it. This is indeed the very work God has given man to do—to subdue the earth and make the desert blossom as the rose. God is with us in this work, and he who believes in God's purpose and strives to reclaim nature and compel it to some better products than it naturally yields, is doing God's

work in the world. The misery is that so many do it in the spirit of Cain, in a spirit of self-confident or sullen alienation from God, willing to endure all hardship but unable to lay themselves at God's feet with every capacity for work and every field He has given them to till for Him and in a spirit of humble love to co-operate with Him. To this spirit of godless energy, of merely selfish or worldly ambition and enterprise, the world owes not only much of its poverty and many of its greatest disasters, but also the greater part of its present advantages in external civilisation. But from this spirit can never arise the meekness, the patience, the tenderness, the charity which sweeten the life of society and are more to be desired than gold; from this spirit and all its achievements the natural outcome is the proud, vindictive, self-glorifying war-song of a Lamech.

The incompatibility of the two lines and the persecuting spirit of the godless are set forth by the after history of Cain and Abel. The one line is represented in Cain, who with all his energy and indomitable courage, is depicted as of a dark, morose, suspicious, jealous, violent temper; a man born under the shadow of the fall. Abel is described in contrast as guileless and sunny, free from harshness and resentment. What was in Cain was shown by what came out of him, murder. The reason of the rejection of his offering was his own evil condition of heart. "If thou doest well, shalt not thou also be accepted;" implying that he was not accepted because he was not doing well. His offering was a mere form; he complied with the fashion of the family; but in spirit he was alienated from God, cherishing thoughts which the rejection of his offering brings to a head. He may have seen that the younger

son won more of the parents' affection, that his company was more welcome. Jealousy had been produced, that deep jealousy of the humble and godly which proud men of the world cannot help betraying and which has so very often in the world's history produced persecution.

This cannot be considered too weak a motive to carry so enormous a crime. Even in a highly civilised age we find an English statesman saying: "Pique is one of the strongest motives in the human mind. Fear is strong but transient. Interest is more lasting, perhaps, and steady, but weaker; I will ever back pique against them both. It is the spur the devil rides the noblest tempers with, and will do more work with them in a week, than with other poor jades in a twelvemonth." And the age of Cain and Abel was an age in which impulse and action lay close together, and in which jealousy is notoriously strong. To this motive John ascribes the act: "Wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

We have now learned better how to disguise our feelings; and we are compelled to control them better; but now and again we meet with a deep-seated hatred of goodness which might give rise to almost any crime. Few of us can say that for our own part we have extinguished within us the spirit that disparages and depreciates and fixes the charge of hypocrisy or refers good actions to interested motives, searches out failings and watches for haltings and is glad when a blot is found. Few are filled with unalloyed grief when the man who has borne an extraordinary reputation turns out to be just like the rest of us. Many of us have a true delight in goodness and humble ourselves before it

when we see it, and yet we know also what it is to be exasperated by the presence of superiority. I have seen a schoolboy interrupt his brother's prayers, and gird at him for his piety, and strive to draw him into sin, and do the devil's work with zest and diligence. And where goodness is manifestly in the minority how constantly does it excite hatred that pours itself out in sneers and ridicule and ignorant calumny.

But this narrative significantly refers this early quarrel to religion. There is no bitterness to compare with that which worldly men who profess religion, feel towards those who cultivate a spiritual religion. They can never really grasp the distinction between external worship and real godliness. They make their offerings, they attend to the rites of the religion to which they belong and are beside themselves with indignation if any person or event suggests to them that they might have saved themselves all their trouble, because these do not at all constitute religion. They uphold the Church, they admire and praise her beautiful services, they use strong but meaningless language about infidelity, and yet when brought in contact with spirituality and assured that regeneration and penitent humility are required above all else in the kingdom of God, they betray an utter inability to comprehend the very rudiments of the Christian religion. Abel has always to go to the wall because he is always the weaker party, always in the minority. Spiritual religion, from the very nature of the case, must always be in the minority; and must be prepared to suffer loss, calumny, and violence, at the hands of the worldly religious, who have contrived for themselves a worship that calls for no humiliation before God and no complete surrender of heart and will to Him. Cain is the type of the

ignorant religious, of the unregenerate man who thinks he merits God's favour as much as any one else; and Cain's conduct is the type of the treatment which the Christ-like and intelligent godly are always likely to receive at such hands.

We never know where we may be led by jealousy and malice. One of the striking features of this incident is the rapidity with which small sins generate great ones. When Cain went in the joy of harvest and offered his first fruits no thought could be further from his mind than murder. It may have come as suddenly on himself as on the unsuspecting Abel, but the germ was in him. Great sins are not so sudden as they seem. Familiarity with evil thought ripens us for evil action; and a moment of passion, an hour's loss of self-control, a tempting occasion, may hurry us into irremediable evil. And even though this does not happen, envious, uncharitable, and malicious thoughts make our offerings as distasteful as Cain's. He that loveth not his brother knoweth not God. First be reconciled to thy brother, says our Lord, and then come and offer thy gift.

Other truths are incidentally taught in this narrative.

(1) The acceptance of the offering depends on the acceptance of the offerer. God had respect to Abel and his offering—the man first and then the offering. God looks through the offering to the state of soul from which it proceeds; or even, as the words would indicate, sees the soul first and judges and treats the offering according to the inward disposition. God does not judge of what you are by what you say to Him or do for Him, but He judges what you say to Him and do for Him by what you are. "By *faith*" says a New Testament writer, "Abel offered a more acceptable

sacrifice than Cain." He had the faith which enabled him to believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. His attitude towards God was sound; his life was a diligent seeking to please God; and from all such persons God gladly receives acknowledgment. When the offering is the true expression of the soul's gratitude, love, devotedness, then it is acceptable. When it is a merely external offering, that rather veils than expresses the real feeling; when it is not vivified and rendered significant by any spiritual act on the part of the worshipper, it is plainly of no effect.

What is true of all sacrifices is true of the sacrifice of Christ. It remains invalid and of none effect to those who do not through it yield themselves to God. Sacrifices were intended to be the embodiment and expression of a state of feeling towards God, of a submission or offering of men's selves to God; of a return to that right relation which ought ever to subsist between creature and Creator. Christ's sacrifice is valid for us when it is that outward thing which best expresses our feeling towards God and through which we offer or yield ourselves to God. His sacrifice is the open door through which God freely admits all who aim at a consecration and obedience like to His. It is valid for us when through it we sacrifice ourselves. Whatever His sacrifice expresses we desire to take and use as the only satisfactory expression of our own aims and desires. Did Christ perfectly submit to and fulfil the will of God? So would we. Did He acknowledge the infinite evil of sin and patiently bear its penalties, still loving the Holy and Righteous God? So would we endure all chastening, and still resist unto blood striving against sin.

(2) Again, we here find a very sharp and clear statement of the welcome truth, that continuance in sin is never a necessity, that God points the way out of sin, and that from the first He has been on man's side and has done all that could be done to keep men from sinning. Observe how He expostulates with Cain. Take note of the plain, explicit fairness of the words in which He expostulates with him—instance, as it is, of how absolutely in the right God always is, and how abundantly He can justify all His dealings with us. God says as it were to Cain; Come now: and let us reason together. All God wants of any man is to be reasonable; to look at the facts of the case. "If thou doest well, shalt thou not (as well as Abel) be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door," that is, if thou doest not well, the sin is not Abel's nor any one's but thine own, and therefore anger at another is not the proper remedy, but anger at yourself, and repentance.

No language could more forcibly exhibit the unreasonableness of not meeting God with penitent and humble acknowledgment. God has fully met our case, and has satisfied all its demands, has set Himself to serve us and laid Himself out to save us pain and misery, and has so entirely succeeded in making salvation and blessedness possible to us, that if we continue in sin we must trample not only upon God's love and our own reason, but on the very means of salvation. State your case at the worst, bring forward every reason why your countenance should be fallen as Cain's and why your face should lower with the gloom of eternal despair—say that you have as clear evidence as Cain had that your offerings are displeasing to God, and that while others are accepted you receive no token from Him,—in answer to all your arguments,

these words addressed to Cain rise up. If not accepted already you have the means of being so. If you do well to be hardened in sin it is not because it is necessary, nor because God desires it. If you are to continue in sin you must put aside His hand. It can only be *sin* which causes you either to despair of salvation or keeps you any way separate from God—there is no other thing worse than sin, and for sin there is an offering provided. You have not fallen into some lower grade of beings than that which is designated sinners, and it is sinners that God in His mercy hems in with this inevitable dilemma He presented to Cain.

If, therefore, you continue at war with God it is not because you must not do otherwise: if you go forward to any new thought, plan, or action unpardoned; if acceptance of God's forgiveness and entrance into a state of reconciliation with Him be not your first action, then you must thrust aside His counsel, backed though it is with every utterance of your own reason. Some of us may be this day or this week in as critical a position as Cain, having as truly as he the making or marring of our future in our hands, seeing clearly the right course, and all that is good, humble, penitent and wise in us urging us to follow that course, but our pride and self-will holding us back. How often do men thus barter a future of blessing for some mean gratification of temper or lust or pride; how often by a reckless, almost listless and indifferent continuance in sin do they let themselves be carried on to a future as woful as Cain's; how often when God expostulates with them do they make no answer and take no action, as if there were nothing to be gained by listening to God—as if it were a matter of no importance what

future I go to—as if in the whole eternity that lies in reserve there were nothing worth making a choice about—nothing about which it is worth my while to rouse the whole energy of which I am capable, and to make, by God's grace, the determination which shall alter my whole future—to choose for myself and assert myself.

(3) The writer to the Hebrews makes a very striking use of this event. He borrows from it language in which to magnify the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, and affirms that the blood of Christ speaketh better things, or, as it must rather be rendered, crieth louder than the blood of Abel. Abel's blood, we see, cried for vengeance, for evil things for Cain, called God to make inquisition for blood, and so pled as to secure the punishment of the murderer. The Arabs have a belief that over the grave of a murdered man his spirit hovers in the form of a bird that cries "Give me drink, give me drink," and only ceases when the blood of the murderer is shed. Cain's conscience told him the same thing; there was no criminal law threatening death to the murderer, but he felt that men would kill him if they could. He heard the blood of Abel crying from the earth. The blood of Christ also cries to God, but cries not for vengeance but for pardon. And as surely as the one cry was heard and answered in very substantial results; so surely does the other cry call down from heaven its proper and beneficent effects. It is as if the earth would not receive and cover the blood of Christ, but ever exposes it before God and cries to Him to be faithful and just to forgive us our sins. This blood cries louder than the other. If God could not overlook the blood of one of His servants, but adjudged to it its proper consequences,

neither is it possible that He should overlook the blood of His Son and not give to it its proper result.

If then you feel in your conscience that you are as guilty as Cain, and if sins clamour around you which are as dangerous as his, and which cry out for judgment upon you, accept the assurance that the blood of Christ has a yet louder cry for mercy. If you had been Abel's murderer, would you have been justly afraid of God's anger? Be as sure of God's mercy now. If you had stood over his lifeless body and seen the earth refusing to cover his blood, if you felt the stain of it crimson on your conscience and if by night you started from your sleep striving vainly to wash it from your hands, if by every token you felt yourself exposed to a just punishment, your fear would be just and reasonable were nothing else revealed to you. But there is another blood equally indelible, equally clamorous. In it you have in reality what is elsewhere pretended in fable, that the blood of the murdered man will not wash out, but through every cleansing oozes up again a dark stain on the oaken floor. This blood can really not be washed out, it cannot be covered up and hid from God's eye, its voice cannot be stifled, and its cry is all for mercy.

With how different a meaning then comes now to us this question of God's: "Where is thy brother?" Our Brother also is slain. Him Whom God sent among us to reverse the curse, to lighten the burden of this life, to be the loving member of the family on Whom each leans for help and looks to for counsel and comfort—Him Who was by His goodness to be as the dayspring from on high in our darkness, we found *too* good for our endurance and dealt with as Cain dealt with his more righteous brother. But He Whom we

slew God has raised again to give repentance and remission of sins, and assures us that His blood cleanseth from all sin. To every one therefore He repeats this question, "Where is thy brother?" He repeats it to every one who is living with a conscience stained with sin; to every one that knows remorse and walks with the hanging head of shame; to every one whose whole life is saddened by the consciousness that all is not settled between God and himself; to every one who is sinning recklessly as if Christ's blood had never been shed for sin; and to every one who, though seeking to be at peace with God, is troubled and downcast—to all God says, "Where is thy brother?" tenderly reminding us of the absolute satisfaction for sin that has been made, and of the hope towards God we have through the blood of His Son.

IV.

CAIN'S LINE, AND ENOCH.

GENESIS iv. 12-24.

"MY punishment is greater than I can bear," so felt Cain as soon as his passion had spent itself and the consequences of his wickedness became apparent—and so feels every one who finds he has now to live in the presence of the irrevocable deed he has done. It seems too heavy a penalty to endure for the one hour of passion; and yet as little as Cain could rouse the dead Abel so little can we revive the past we have destroyed. Thoughtlessness has set in motion agencies we are powerless to control; the whole world is changed to us. One can fancy Cain turning to see if his victim gave no sign of life, striving to reanimate the dead body, calling the familiar name, but only to see with growing dismay that the one blow had finished all with which that name was associated, and that he had made himself a new world. So are we drawn back and back in thought to that which has for ever changed life to us, striving to see if there is no possibility of altering the past, but only to find we might quite as well try to raise the dead. No voice responds to our cries of grief and dismay and too late repentance. All life now seems but a reaping of the consequences of the past. We have put ourselves in

every respect at a disadvantage. The earth seems cursed so that we are hampered in our employments and cannot make as much of them as we would had we been innocent. We have got out of right relations to our fellow-men and cannot feel the same to them as we ought to feel; and the face of God is hid from us, so that now and again as time after time our hopes are blighted, our life darkened and disturbed by the obvious results of our own past deeds, we are tempted to cry out with Cain: "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

Yet Cain's punishment was less than he expected. He was not put to death as he would have been at any later period of the world's history, but was banished. And even this punishment was lightened by his having a token from God, that he would not be put to death by any zealous avenger of Abel. He would experience the hardships of a man entering unexplored territory, but to an enterprising spirit this would not be without its charms. As the fresh beauties of the world's youth were disclosed to him and by their bright and peaceful friendliness allayed the bitterness of his spirit, and as the mysteries and dangers of the new regions excited him and called his thoughts from the past, some of the old delight in life may have been recovered by him. Probably in many a lonely hour the recollection of his crime would return and with it all the horrors of a remorse which would drive rest and peace from his soul, and render him the most wretched of men. But busied as he was with his new enterprises, there is little doubt that he would find it, as it is still found, not impossible to banish such dreary thoughts and live in the measure of contentment which many enjoy who are as far from God as Cain.

It is not difficult to detect the spirit he carried with

him, and the tone he gave to his line of the race. The facts recorded are few but significant. He begat a son, he built a city; and he gave to both the name Enoch that is "initiation," or "beginning," as if he were saying in his heart, "What so great harm after all in cutting short one line in Abel? I can begin another and find a new starting point for the race. I am driven forth cursed as a vagabond, but a vagabond I will not be; I will make for myself a settled abode, and I will fence it round with knife-blade thorns so that no man will be able to assault me."

In this settling of Cain, however, we see not any symptom of his ceasing to be a vagabond, but the surest evidence that now he was content to be a fugitive from God and had cut himself off from hope. His heart had found rest and had found it apart from God. *Here*, in this city he would make a fresh beginning for himself and for men. Here he abandoned all clinging memories of former things, of his old home and of the God there worshipped. He had wisdom enough not to call his city by his own name, and so invite men to consider his former career or trace back anything to his old life. He cut it all off from him; his crime, his God also, all that was in it was to be no more to him and his comrades. He would make a clean start, and that men might be led to expect a great future he called his city, Enoch, a Beginning.

But it is one thing to forgive ourselves, another thing to have God's forgiveness. It is one thing to reconcile ourselves to the curse that runs through our life, another thing to be reconciled to God and so defeat the curse. It is sometimes, though by no means always, possible to escape some of the consequences of sin: we can change our front so as to lessen the breadth of life

that is exposed to them, or we can accustom and harden ourselves to a very second-rate kind of life. We can teach ourselves to live without much love in our homes or in our connections with those outside; we can learn to be satisfied if we can pay our way and make the time pass and be outwardly like other people; we can build a little city, and be content to be on no very friendly terms with any but the select few inside the trench, and actually be quite satisfied if we can *defend ourselves against* the rest of men; we can forget the one commandment, that we should love one another. We can all find much in the world to comfort, to lull, to soothe sorrowful but wholesome remembrances; much to aid us in an easy treatment of the curse; much to shed superficial brightness on a life darkened and debased by sin, much to hush up the sad echoes that mutter from the dark mountains of vanity we have left behind us, much that assures us we have nothing to do but forget our old sins and busily occupy ourselves with new duties. But no David will say, nor will any man of true spiritual discernment say, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is *forgotten;*" but only, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven." By all means make a fresh start, a new beginning, but let it be in your own broken heart, in a spirit humble and contrite, frankly acknowledging your guilt and finding rest and settlement for your soul in reconciliation with God.

It is in the family of Lamech the characteristics of Cain's line are most distinctly seen, and the significance of their tendencies becomes apparent. As Cain had set himself to cultivate the curse out of the world, so have his children derived from him the self-reliant hardiness and hardihood which are resolute to make of this world

as bright and happy a home as may be. They make it their task to subdue the world and compel it to yield them a life in which they can delight. They are so far successful that in a few generations they have formed a home in which all the essentials of civilized life are found—the arts are cultivated and female society is appreciated.

Of his three sons, Jabal—or "Increase"—was "the father of such as dwell in tents and of such as have cattle." He had originality enough to step beyond all traditional habits and to invent a new mode of life. Hitherto men had been tied to one spot by their fixed habitations, or found shelter when overtaken by storm in caves or trees. To Jabal the idea first occurs, I can carry my house about with me and regulate its movements and not it mine. I need not return every night this long weary way from the pastures, but may go wherever grass is green and streams run cool. He and his comrades would thus become aware of the vast resources of other lands, and would unconsciously lay the foundations both of commerce and of wars of conquest. For both in ancient and more modern times the most formidable armies have been those vast moving shepherd races bred outside the borders of civilization and flooding as with an irresistible tide the territories of more settled and less hardy tribes.

Jubal again was, as his name denotes, the reputed father of all such as handle the harp and the organ, stringed and wind instruments. The stops of the reed or flute and the divisions of the string being once discovered, all else necessarily followed. The twanging of a bow-string in a musical ear was enough to give the suggestion to an observant mind; the varying notes of the birds; the winds expressing at one time

unbridled fury and at another a breathing benediction, could not fail to move and stir the susceptible spirit. The spontaneous though untuned singing of children, that follows no mere melody made by another to express *his* joy, but is the instinctive expression of their own joy, could not but give however meagrely the first rudiments of music. But here was the man who first made a piece of wood help him; who out of the commonest material of the physical world found for himself a means of expressing the most impalpable moods of his spirit. Once the idea was caught that matter inanimate as well as animate was man's servant and could do his finest work for him, Jabal and his brother Jubal would make rapid work between them. If the rude matter of the world could *sing* for them, what might it not do for them? They would see that there was a precision in machine-work which man's hand could not rival—a regularity which no nervous throb could throw out and no feeling interrupt, and yet at the same time when they found how these rude instruments responded to every finest shade of feeling, and how all external nature seemed able to express what was in man, must it not have been the birth of poetry as well as of music? Jubal in short originates what we now compendiously describe as the Fine Arts.

The third brother again may be taken as the originator of the Useful Arts—though not exclusively—for being the instructor of every artificer in brass and iron, having something of his brother's genius for invention and more than his brother's handiness and practical faculty for embodying his ideas in material forms, he must have promoted all arts which require tools for their culture.

Thus among these three brothers we find distributed the various kinds of genius and faculty which ever since have enriched the world. Here in germ was really all that the world can do. The great lines in which individual and social activity have since run were then laid down.

This notable family circle was completed by Naamah, the sister of Tubal-Cain. The strength of female influence began to be felt contemporaneously with the cultivation of the arts. Very early in the world's history it was perceived that although debarred from the rougher activities of life, women have an empire of their own. Men have the making of civilisation, but women have the making of men. It is they who form the character of the individual and give its tone to the society in which they live. It is natural to men to consider the feelings and tastes of women and to adapt their manners and conversation to them; and it is for women to exercise worthily the sway they thus possess. Practically and to a large extent women settle what subjects shall be spoken of, and in what tone, trifling or serious; and each ought therefore to recognise her own burden of responsibility, and see to it that the deference paid to her shall not lower him who pays it, and that the respect shown to her shall help him who shows it to respect what is pure and true, charitable, just, and worthy. Let women show that it is worldly trifling or slanderous malignity or empty tittle-tattle that delights them, then they act the part of Eve and tempt to sin; let them show that they prize most highly the mirth that is innocent and the conversation that is elevating and helpful, and while they win admiration for themselves they win it also for what is healthy and purifying. No woman can renounce her influence; helpful

or hurtful she certainly is and must be in proportion as she is pleasing and attractive.

Thus early did it appear how much of what is admirable and serviceable clung to human nature apart from any recognition of God. The worldly life was then what it is now, a life not wholly and obviously polluted by excess, nor destroyed by violence, but displaying features which appeal to our sensibilities and provoke applause; a life of manifold beauty, of great power and resource, of abundant promise. There is abundant material in the world for beautifying and elevating human life, and this material may be used and is used by men who acknowledge neither its origin in God nor the ends He would serve by it. The interests of men may be advanced and the best work of the world done by three distinct classes of men—by those who work as God's children in thorough sympathy with His purposes; by those who do not know God but who are humble in heart and would sympathise with God's purposes, did they become acquainted with them; and by those who are proud and self-willed, positively alienated from God, and who do the world's work for their own ends. And so far as the external work goes the last-named class of men may be most efficient. In mental endowment, social and political wisdom, scientific aptitude, and all that tends to substantial utility, it is quite possible they may excel the godly, for "not many noble, not many wise are called." But we have nothing to measure permanent success by, save conformity with God's will; and we have nothing by which we can estimate how character will endure and how deeply it is rooted save conformity with the nature of God. If a man believes in God, in one Supreme Who rules and orders all things for just, holy and wise

ends; if he is in sympathy with the nature and will of God and finds his truest satisfaction in forwarding the purposes of God, then you have a guarantee for this man's continuance in good and for his ultimate success.

The precarious nature of all godless civilisation and the real tendency of self-sufficing pride are shown in Lamech.

It is in Lamech the tendency culminates and in him the issue of all this brilliant but godless life is seen. Therefore though he is the father, the historian speaks of him *after* his children. In his one recorded utterance his character leaps to view definite and complete—a character of boundless force, self-reliance and godlessness. It is a little uncertain whether he means that he has actually slain a man, or whether he is putting a hypothetical case—the character of his speech is the same whichever view is taken.

> "I have slain," he says, or suppose I slay, "a man for wounding me,
> A young man for hurting me:
> But if Cain shall be avenged seven-fold—then Lamech seventy and seven-fold."

That is, I take vengeance for myself with those good weapons my son has forged for me. He has furnished me with a means of defence many times more effectual than God's avenging of Cain. This is the climax of the self-sufficiency to which the line of Cain has been tending. Cain besought God's protection; he needed God for at least one purpose, this one thread bound him yet to God. Lamech has no need of God for any purpose; what his sons can make and his own right hand do is enough for him. This is what comes of finding enough in the world without God—a boastful, self-sufficient man, dangerous to society, the incarnation

of the pride of life. In the long run separation from God becomes isolation from man and cruel self-sufficiency.

The line of Seth is followed from father to son, for the sake of showing that the promise of a seed which should be victorious over evil was being fulfilled. Apparently it is also meant that during this uneventful period long ages elapsed. Nothing can be told of these old world people but that they lived and died, leaving behind them heirs to transmit the promise.

Only once is the monotony broken; but this in so striking a manner as to rescue us from the idea that the historian is mechanically copying a barren list of names. For in the seventh generation, contemporaneous with the culmination of Cain's line in the family of Lamech, we come upon the simple but anything but mechanical statement: "Enoch walked with God and he was not; for God took him." The phrase is full of meaning. Enoch walked with God because he was His friend and liked His company, because he was going in the same direction as God, and had no desire for anything but what lay in God's path. We walk with God when He is in all our thoughts; not because we consciously think of Him at all times, but because He is naturally suggested to us by all we think of; as when any person or plan or idea has become important to us, no matter what we think of, our thought is always found recurring to this favourite object, so with the godly man everything has a connection with God and must be ruled by that connection. When some change in his circumstances is thought of, he has first of all to determine how the proposed change will affect his connection with God—will his conscience be equally clear, will he be able to live on the same friendly terms with God

and so forth. When he falls into sin he cannot rest till he has resumed his place at God's side and walks again with Him. This is the general nature of walking with God; it is a persistent endeavour to hold all our life open to God's inspection and in conformity to His will; a readiness to give up what we find does cause any misunderstanding between us and God; a feeling of loneliness if we have not some satisfaction in our efforts at holding fellowship with God, a cold and desolate feeling when we are conscious of doing something that displeases Him. This walking with God necessarily tells on the whole life and character. As you instinctively avoid subjects which you know will jar upon the feelings of your friend, as you naturally endeavour to suit yourself to your company, so when the consciousness of God's presence begins to have some weight with you, you are found instinctively endeavouring to please Him, repressing the thoughts you know He disapproves, and endeavouring to educate such dispositions as reflect His own nature.

It is easy then to understand how we may practically walk with God—it is to open to Him all our purposes and hopes, to seek His judgment on our scheme of life and idea of happiness—it is to be on thoroughly friendly terms with God. Why then do any not walk with God? Because they seek what is wrong. You would walk with Him if the same idea of good possessed you as possesses Him; if you were as ready as He to make no deflexion from the straight path. Is not the very crown of life depicted in the testimony given to Enoch, that "he pleased God"? Cannot you take your way through life with a resolute and joyous spirit if you are conscious that you please Him Who judges not by appearances, not by your manners, but

by your real state, by your actual character and the eternal promise it bears? Things were not made easy to Enoch. In evil days, with much to mislead him, with everything to oppose him, he had by faith and diligent seeking, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, to cleave to the path on which God walked, often left in darkness, often thrown off the track, often listening but unable to hear the footfall of God or to hear his own name called upon, receiving no sign but still diligently seeking the God he knew would lead him only to good. Be it yours to give such diligence. Do not accept it as a thing fixed that you are to be one of the graceless and ungodly, always feeble, always vacillating, always without a character, always in doubt about your state, and whether life might not be some other and better thing to you.

"Enoch was not, for God took him." Suddenly his place on earth was empty and men drew their own conclusions. He had been known as the Friend of God, where could he be but in God's dwelling-place? No sickness had slowly worn him to the grave, no mark of decay had been visible in his unabated vigour. His departure was a favour conferred and as such men recognised it. "God has taken him," they said, and their thoughts followed upward, and essayed to conceive the finished bliss of the man whom God has taken away where blessing may be more fully conferred. His age corresponded to our thirty-three, the age when the world has usually got fair hold of a man, when a man has found his place in life and means to live and see good days. The awkward, unfamiliar ways of youth that keep him outside of much of life are past, and the satiety of age is not yet reached; a man has begun to learn there is something he can do, and has

not yet learned how little. It is an age at which it is most painful to relinquish life, but it was at this age God took him away, and men knew it was in kindness. Others had begun to gather round him, and depend upon him, hopes were resting in him, great things were expected of him, life was strong in him. But let life dress itself in its most attractive guise, let it shine on a man with its most fascinating smile, let him be happy at home and the pleasing centre of a pleasing circle of friends, let him be in that bright summer of life when a man begins to fear he is too prosperous and happy, and yet there is for man a better thing than all this, a thing so immeasurably and independently superior to it that all this may be taken away and yet the man be far more blessed. If God would confer His highest favours, He must take a man out of all this and bring him closer to Himself

CHAPTER V.

THE FLOOD.

GENESIS v–ix.

THE first great event which indelibly impressed itself on the memory of the primeval world was the Flood. There is every reason to believe that this catastrophe was co-extensive with the human population of the world. In every branch of the human family traditions of the event are found. These traditions need not be recited, though some of them bear a remarkable likeness to the Biblical story, while others are very beautiful in their construction, and significant in individual points. Local floods happening at various times in different countries could not have given birth to the minute coincidences found in these traditions, such as the sending out of the birds, and the number of persons saved. But we have as yet no material for calculating how far human population had spread from the original centre. It might apparently be argued that it could not have spread to the sea-coast, or that at any rate no ships had as yet been built large enough to weather a severe storm; for a thoroughly nautical population could have had little difficulty in surviving such a catastrophe as is here described. But all that can be affirmed is that there is no evidence that the waters extended beyond the inhabited part of the earth; and from certain details

of the narrative, this part of the earth may be identified as the great plain of the Euphrates and Tigris.

. Some of the expressions used in the narrative might indeed lead us to suppose that the writer understood the catastrophe to have extended over the whole globe; but expressions of similar largeness elsewhere occur in passages where their meaning must be restricted. Probably the most convincing evidence of the limited extent of the Flood is furnished by the animals of Australia. The animals that abound in that island are different from those found in other parts of the world, but are similar to the species which are found fossilized in the island itself, and which therefore must have inhabited these same regions long anterior to the Flood. If then the Flood extended to Australia and destroyed all animal life there, what are we compelled to suppose as the order of events? We must suppose that the creatures, visited by some presentiment of what was to happen many months after, selected specimens of their number, and that these specimens by some unknown and quite inconceivable means crossed thousands of miles of sea, found their way through all kinds of perils from unaccustomed climate, food, and beasts of prey; singled out Noah by some inscrutable instinct, and surrendered themselves to his keeping. And after the year in the ark expired, they turned their faces homewards, leaving behind them no progeny, again preserving themselves intact, and transporting themselves by some unknown means to their island home. This, if the Deluge was universal, must have been going on with thousands of animals from all parts of the globe; and not only were these animals a stupendous miracle in themselves, but wherever they went they were the occasion of miracle in others, all the beasts of prey

refraining from their natural food. The fact is, the thing will not bear stating.

But it is not the physical but the moral aspects of the Flood with which we have here to do. And, first, this narrator explains its cause. He ascribes it to the abnormal wickedness of the antediluvians. To describe the demoralised condition of society before the Flood, the strongest language is used. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great," monstrous in acts of violence, and in habitual courses and established usages. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,"—there was no mixture of good, no relentings, no repentances, no visitings of compunction, no hesitations and debatings. It was a world of men fierce and energetic, violent and lawless, in perpetual war and turmoil; in which if a man sought to live a righteous life, he had to conceive it of his own mind and to follow it out unaided and without the countenance of any.

This abnormal wickedness again is accounted for by the abnormal marriages from which the leaders of these ages sprang. Everything seemed abnormal, huge, inhuman. As there are laid bare to the eye of the geologist in those archaic times vast forms bearing a likeness to forms we are now familiar with, but of gigantic proportions and wallowing in dim, mist-covered regions; so to the eye of the historian there loom through the obscurity colossal forms perpetrating deeds of more than human savagery, and strength, and daring; heroes that seem formed in a different mould from common men.

However we interpret the narrative, its significance for us is plain. There is nothing prudish in the Bible. It speaks with a manly frankness of the beauty of

women and its ensnaring power. The Mosaic law was stringent against intermarriage with idolatresses, and still in the New Testament something more than an echo of the old denunciation of such marriages is heard. Those who were most concerned about preserving a pure morality and a high tone in society were keenly alive to the dangers that threatened from this quarter. It is a permanent danger to character because it is to a permanent element in human nature that the temptation appeals. To many in every generation, perhaps to the majority, this is the most dangerous form in which worldliness presents itself; and to resist this the most painful test of principle. With natures keenly sensitive to beauty and superficial attractiveness, some are called upon to make their choice between a conscientious cleaving to God and an attachment to that which in the form is perfect but at heart is defective, depraved, godless. Where there is great outward attraction a man fights against the growing sense of inward uncongeniality, and persuades himself he is too scrupulous and uncharitable, or that he is a bad reader of character. There may be an undercurrent of warning; he may be sensible that his whole nature is not satisfied and it may seem to him ominous that what is best within him does not flourish in his new attachment, but rather what is inferior, if not what is worst. But all such omens and warnings are disregarded and stifled by some such silly thought as that consideration and calculation are out of place in such matters. And what is the result? The result is the same as it ever was. Instead of the ungodly rising to the level of the godly, he sinks to hers. The worldly style, the amusements, the fashions once distasteful to him, but allowed for her sake, become familiar, and at last wholly displace the

old and godly ways, the arrangements that left room for acknowledging God in the family; and there is one household less as a point of resistance to the incursion of an ungodly tone in society, one deserter more added to the already too crowded ranks of the ungodly, and the life-time if not the eternity of one soul embittered. Not without a consideration of the temptations that do actually lead men astray did the law enjoin: "Thou shalt not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, nor take of their daughters unto thy sons."

It seems like a truism to say that a greater amount of unhappiness has been produced by mismanagement, folly, and wickedness in the relation subsisting between men and women than by any other cause. God has given us the capacity of love to regulate this relation and be our safe guide in all matters connected with it. But frequently, from one cause or another, the government and direction of this relation are taken out of the hands of love and put into the thoroughly incompetent hands of convenience, or fancy, or selfish lust. A marriage contracted from any such motive is sure to bring unhappiness of a long-continued, wearing and often heart-breaking kind. Such a marriage is often the form in which retribution comes for youthful selfishness and youthful licentiousness. You cannot cheat nature. Just in so far as you allow yourself to be ruled in youth by a selfish love of pleasure, in so far do you incapacitate yourself for love. You sacrifice what is genuine and satisfying, because provided by nature, to what is spurious, unsatisfying, and shameful. You cannot afterwards, unless by a long and bitter discipline, restore the capacity of warm and pure love in your heart. Every indulgence in which true love is absent is another blow given to the faculty of love within you

—you make yourself in that capacity decrepit, paralyzed, dead. You have lost, you have killed the faculty that should be your guide in all these matters, and so you are at last precipitated without this guidance into a marriage formed from some other motive, formed therefore against nature, and in which you are the everlasting victim of nature's relentless justice. Remember that you cannot have both things, a youth of loveless pleasure and a loving marriage—you must make your choice. For as surely as genuine love kills all evil desire; so surely does evil desire kill the very capacity of love, and blind utterly its wretched victim to the qualities that ought to excite love.

The language used of God in relation to this universal corruption strikes every one as remarkable. "It repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart." This is what is usually termed anthropomorphism, *i.e.* the presenting of God in terms applicable only to man; it is an instance of the same mode of speaking as is used when we speak of God's hand or eye or heart. These expressions are not absolutely true, but they are useful and convey to us a meaning which could scarcely otherwise be expressed. Some persons think that the use of these expressions proves that in early times God was thought of as wearing a body and as being very like ourselves in His inward nature. And even in our day we have been ridiculed for speaking of God as a magnified man. Now in the first place the use of such expressions does not prove that even the earliest worshippers of God believed Him to have eyes and hands and a body. *We* freely use the same expressions though we have no such belief. We use them because our language is formed for human uses and on a

human level, and we have no capacity to frame a better. And in the second place, though not absolutely true they do help us towards the truth. We are told that it degrades God to think of Him as hearing prayer and accepting praise; nay, that to think of Him as a Person at all, is to degrade Him. We ought to think of Him as the Absolutely Unknowable. But which degrades God most, and which exalts Him most? If we find that it is impossible to worship an absolutely unknowable, if we find that practically such an idea is a mere nonentity to us, and that we cannot in point of fact pay any homage or show any consideration to such an empty abstraction, is not this really to lower God? And if we find that when we think of Him as a Person, and ascribe to Him all human virtue in an infinite degree, we can rejoice in Him and worship Him with true adoration, is not this to exalt Him? While we call Him our Father we know that this title is inadequate, while we speak of God as planning and decreeing we know that we are merely making shift to express what is inexpressible by us—we know that our thoughts of Him are never adequate and that to think of Him at all is to lower Him, is to think of Him inadequately; but when the practical alternative is such as it is, we find we do well to think of Him with the highest personal attributes we can conceive For to refuse to ascribe such attributes to Him because this is degrading Him, is to empty our minds of any idea of Him which can stimulate either to worship or to duty. If by ridding our minds of all anthropomorphic ideas and refusing to think of God as feeling, thinking, acting as men do, we could thereby get to a really higher conception of Him, a conception which would practically make us worship Him more de-

votedly and serve Him more faithfully, then by all means let us do so. But if the result of refusing to think of Him as in many ways like ourselves, is that we cease to think of Him at all or only as a dead impersonal force, then this certainly is not to reach a higher but a lower conception of Him. And until we see our way to some truly higher conception than that which we have of a Personal God, we had better be content with it.

In short, we do well to be humble, and considering that we know very little about existence of any kind, and least of all about God's, and that our God has been presented to us in human form, we do well to accept Christ as our God, to worship, love, and serve Him, finding Him sufficient for all our wants of this life, and leaving it to other times to get the solution of anything that is not made plain to us in Him. This is one boon that the science and philosophy of our day have unintentionally conferred upon us. They have laboured to make us feel how remote and inaccessible God is, how little we can know Him, how truly He is past finding out; they have laboured to make us feel how intangible and invisible and incomprehensible God is, but the result of this is that we turn with all the stronger longing to Him who is the Image of the Invisible God, and on whom a voice has fallen from the excellent glory, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him."

The Flood itself we need not attempt to describe. It has been remarked that though the narrative is vivid and forcible, it is entirely wanting in that sort of description which in a modern historian or poet would have occupied the largest space. "We see nothing of the death-struggle; we hear not the cry of despair; we are not called upon to witness the

frantic agony of husband and wife, and parent and child, as they fled in terror before the rising waters. Nor is a word said of the sadness of the one righteous man, who, safe himself, looked upon the destruction which he could not avert." The Chaldean tradition which is the most closely allied to the Biblical account is not so reticent. Tears are shed in heaven over the catastrophe, and even consternation affected its inhabitants, while within the ark itself the Chaldean Noah says, "When the storm came to an end and the terrible water-spout ceased, I opened the window and the light smote upon my face. I looked at the sea attentively observing, and the whole of humanity had returned to mud, like seaweed the corpses floated. I was seized with sadness; I sat down and wept and my tears fell upon my face."

There can be little question that this is a true description of Noah's feeling. And the sense of desolation and constraint would rather increase in Noah's mind than diminish. Month after month elapsed; he was coming daily nearer the end of his food, and yet the waters were unabated. He did not know how long he was to be kept in this dark, disagreeable place. He was left to do his daily work without any supernatural signs to help him against his natural anxieties. The floating of the ark and all that went on in it had no mark of God's hand upon it. He was indeed *safe* while others had been destroyed. But of what good was this safety to be? Was he ever to get out of this prison-house? To what straits was he to be first reduced? So it is often with ourselves. We are left to fulfil God's will without any sensible tokens to set over against natural difficulties, painful and pinching circumstances, ill health, low spirits, failure of favourite pro-

jects and old hopes—so that at last we come to think that perhaps safety is all we are to have in Christ, a mere exemption from suffering of one kind purchased by the endurance of much suffering of another kind; that we are to be thankful for pardon on any terms; and escaping with our *life*, must be content though it be bare. Why, how often does a Christian wonder whether, after all, he has chosen a life that he can endure, whether the monotony and the restraints of the Christian life are not inconsistent with true enjoyment?

This strife between the felt restriction of the Christian life and the natural craving for abundant life, for entrance into all that the world can show us, and experience of all forms of enjoyment—this strife goes on unceasingly in the heart of many of us as it goes on from age to age in the world. Which is the true view of life, which is the view to guide *us* in choosing and refusing the enjoyments and pursuits that are presented to us? Are we to believe that the ideal man for this life is he who has tasted all culture and delight, who believes in nature, recognising no fall and seeking for no redemption, and makes enjoyment his end; or he who sees that all enjoyment is deceptive till man is set right morally, and who spends himself on this, knowing that blood and misery must come before peace and rest, and crowned as our King and Leader, not with a garland of roses, but with the crown of Him Who is greatest of all, because servant of all—to Whom the most sunken is not repulsive, and Who will not abandon the most hopeless? This comes to be very much the question, whether this life is final or preparatory?—whether, therefore, our work in it should be to check lower propensities and develop and train all that is best in character, so as to be fit for highest life and enjoyment

in a world to come—or should take ourselves as we find ourselves, and delight in this present world? whether this is a placid eternal state, in which things are very much as they should be, and in which therefore we can live freely and enjoy freely; or whether it is a disordered, initial condition in which our main task should be to do a little towards putting things on a better rail and getting at least the germ and small beginnings of future good planted in one another? So that in the midst of all felt restriction, there is the highest hope, that one day we shall go forth from the narrow precincts of our ark, and step out into the free bright sunshine, in a world where there is nothing to offend, and that the time of our deprivation will seem to have been well spent indeed, if it has left within us a capacity permanently to enjoy love, holiness, justice, and all that is delighted in by God Himself.

The use made of this event in the New Testament is remarkable. It is compared by Peter to baptism, and both are viewed as illustrations of salvation by destruction. The eight souls, he says, who were in the ark, "were saved by water." The water which destroyed the rest saved them. When there seemed little hope of the godly line being able to withstand the influence of the ungodly, the Flood came and left Noah's family in a new world, with freedom to order all things according to their own ideas. In this Peter sees some analogy to baptism. In baptism, the penitent who believes in the efficacy of Christ's blood to purge away sin, lets his defilement be washed away and rises new and clean to the life Christ gives. In Christ the sinner finds shelter for himself and destruction for his sins. It is God's wrath against sin that saves us by destroying our sins; just as it was the

Flood which devastated the world, that at the same time, and thereby, saved Noah and his family.

In this event, too, we see the completeness of God's work. Often we feel reluctant to surrender our sinful habits to so final a destruction as is implied in being one with Christ. The expense at which holiness is to be bought seems almost too great. So much that has given us pleasure must be parted with; so many old ties sundered, a condition of holiness presents an aspect of dreariness and hopelessness; like the world after the flood, not a moving thing on the surface of the earth, everything levelled, prostrate, and washed even with the ground; here the corpse of a man, there the carcase of a beast; here mighty forest timber swept prone like the rushes on the banks of a flooded stream, and there a city without inhabitants, everything dank, dismal and repellent. But this is only one aspect of the work; the beginning, necessary if the work is to be thorough. If any part of the sinful life remain it will spring up to mar what God means to introduce us to. Only that is to be preserved which we can take with us into our ark. Only that is to pass on into our life which we can retain while we are in true connection with Christ, and which we think can help us to live as His friends, and to serve Him zealously.

This event then gives us some measure by which we can know how much God will do to maintain holiness upon earth. In this catastrophe every one who strives after godliness may find encouragement, seeing in it the Divine earnestness of God for good and against evil. There is only one other event in history that so conspicuously shows that holiness among men is the object for which God will sacrifice everything else. There is no need now of any further

demonstration of God's purpose in this world and His zeal for carrying it out. And may it not be expected of us His children, that we stand in presence of the cross until our cold and frivolous hearts catch something of the earnestness, the "resisting unto blood striving against sin," which is exhibited there? The Flood has not been forgotten by almost any people under heaven, but its moral result is *nil*. But he whose memory is haunted by a dying Redeemer, by the thought of One Whose love found its most appropriate and practical result in dying for him, *is* prevented from much sin, and finds in that love the spring of eternal hope, that which his soul in the deep privacy of his most sacred thoughts can feed upon with joy, that which he builds himself round and broods over as his inalienable possession.

CHAPTER VI.

NOAH'S FALL.

GENESIS ix. 20–27.

NOAH in the ark was in a position of present safety but of much anxiety. No sign of any special protection on God's part was given. The waters seem to stand at their highest level still; and probably the risk of the ark's grounding on some impracticable peak, or precipitous hill-side, would seem as great a danger as the water itself. Five months had elapsed, and though the rain had ceased the sky was heavy and threatening, and every day now was worth many measures of corn in the coming harvest. A reflection of the anxiety within the ark is seen in the expression, "And God remembered Noah." It was needful to say so, for there was as yet no outward sign of this.

To such anxieties all are subject who have availed themselves of the salvation God provides. At the first there is an easy faith in God's aid; there are many signs of His presence; the subjects in whom salvation operates have no disposition or temptation to doubt that God is with them and is working for them. But this initial stage is succeeded by a very different state of things. We seem to be left to ourselves

to cope with the world and all its difficulties and temptations in our own strength. Much as we crave some sign that God remembers us, no sign is given. We no longer receive the same urgent impulses to holiness of life; we have no longer the same freshness in devotion as if speaking to a God at hand. There is nothing which of itself and without reasoning about it says to us, Here is God's hand upon me.

In fact, the great part of our life has to be spent under these conditions, and we need to hold some well-ascertained principle regarding God's dealings, if our faith is to survive. And here in God's treatment of Noah we see that God may as certainly be working for us when not working directly upon us, as when His presence is palpable. His absence from us is as needful as His presence. The clouds are as requisite for our salvation as the sunny sky. When therefore we find that salvation from sin is a much slower and more anxious matter than we once expected it to be, we are not to suppose that God is not hearing our prayers. When Noah day by day cried to God for relief, and yet night after night found himself "cribb'd, cabin'd, and confined," with no sign from God but such as faith could apprehend, depend upon it he had very different feelings from those with which he first stepped into the ark. And when we are left to one monotonous rut of duty and to an unchanging and dry form of devotion, when we are called to learn to live by faith not by sight, to learn that God's purposes with us are spiritual, and that slow and difficult growth in self-command and holiness is the best proof that He hears our prayers, we must strive to believe that this also is a needful part of our salvation; and we must especially be on our guard against supposing that

as God has ceased to disclose Himself to us, and so to make faith easy, we may cease to disclose ourselves to Him.

For this is the natural and very frequent result of such an experience. Discouraged by the obscurity of God's ways and the difficulty of believing when the mind is not sustained by success or by new thoughts or manifest tokens of God's presence, we naturally cease to look for any clear signs of God's concernment about our state, and rest from all anxious craving to know God's will about us. To this temptation the majority of Christian people yield, and allow themselves to become indifferent to spiritual truth and increasingly interested in the non-mysterious facts of the present world, attending to present duties in a mechanical way, seeing that their families have enough to eat and that all in their little ark are provided for. But to this temptation Noah did not yield. Though to all appearance abandoned by God, he did what he could to ascertain what was beyond his immediate sight and present experience. He sent out his raven and his dove. Not satisfied with his first enquiry by the raven, which could flit from one piece of floating garbage to another, he sent out the dove, and continued to do so at intervals of seven days.

Noah sent out the raven first, probably because it had been the most companionable bird and seemed the wisest, preferable to "the silly dove;" but it never came back with God's message. And so has one often found that an enquiry into God's will, the examination, for example, of some portion of Scripture, undertaken with a prospect of success and with good human helps, has failed, and has failed in this peculiar ravenlike way; the enquiry has settled down on some worthless

point, on some rotting carcase, on some subject of passing interest or worldly learning, and brings back no message of God to us. On the other hand, the continued use, Sabbath after Sabbath, of God's appointed means, and the patient waiting for some message of God to come to us through what seems a most unlikely messenger, will often be rewarded. It may be but a single leaf plucked off that we get, but enough to convince us that God has been mindful of our need, and is preparing for us a habitable world.

Many a man is like the raven, feeding himself on the destruction of others, satisfied with knowing how God has dealt with others. He thinks he has done his part when he has found out who has been sinning and what has been the result. But the dove will not settle on any such resting-place, and is dissatisfied until for herself she can pluck off some token that God's anger is turned away and that now there is peace on earth. And if only you wait God's time and renew your endeavours to find such tokens, some assurance will be given you, some green and growing thing, some living part, however small, of the new creation which will certify you of your hope.

On the first day of the first month, New Year's day, Noah removed the covering of the ark, which seems to have stranded on the Armenian tableland, and looked out upon the new world. He cannot but have felt his responsibility, as a kind of second Adam. And many questionings must have arisen in his mind regarding the relation of the new to the old. Was there to be any connection with the old world at all, or was all to begin afresh? Were the promises, the traditions, the events, the genealogies of the old world of any signifi-

cance now? The Flood distinctly marked the going out of one order of things and the establishment of another. Man's career and development, or what we call history, had not before the Flood attained its goal. If this development was not to be broken short off, and if God's purpose in creation was to be fulfilled, then the world must still go on. Some worlds may perhaps die young, as individuals die young. Others endure through hair-breadth escapes and constant dangers, find their way like our planet through showers of fire, and pass without collision the orbits of huge bodies, carrying with them always, as our world does, the materials of their destruction within themselves. But catastrophes do not cut short, but evolve God's purposes. The Flood came that God's purpose might be fulfilled. The course of nature was interrupted, the arrangements of social and domestic life were overturned, all the works of men were swept away that this purpose might be fulfilled. It was expedient that one generation should die for all generations; and this generation having been taken out of the way, fresh provision is made for the co-operation of man with God. On man's part there is an emphatic acknowledgment of God by sacrifice; on God's part there is a renewed grant to man of the world and its fulness, a renewed assurance of His favour.

This covenant with Noah was on the plane of nature. It is man's natural life in the world which is the subject of it. The sacredness of life is its great lesson. Men might well wonder whether God did not hold life cheap. In the old world violence had prevailed. But while Lamech's sword may have slain its thousands, God had in the Flood slain tens of thousands. The covenant, therefore, directs that human life must be

reverenced. The primal blessing is renewed. Men are to multiply and replenish the earth; and the slaughter of a man was to be reckoned a capital crime; and the maintenance of life was guaranteed by a special clause, securing the regularity of the seasons. If, then, you ask, Was this just a beginning again where Adam began? Did God just wipe out man as a boy wipes his slate clean, when he finds his calculation is turning out wrong? Had all these generations learned nothing; had the world not grown at all since its birth?—the answer is, it had grown, and in two most important respects,—it had come to the knowledge of the uniformity of nature, and the necessity of human law. This great departure from the uniformity of nature brought into strong relief its normal uniformity, and gave men their first lesson in the recognition of a God who governs by fixed laws. And they learned also from the Flood that wickedness must not be allowed to grow unchecked and attain dimensions which nothing short of a flood can cope with.

Fit symbol of this covenant was the rainbow. Seeming to unite heaven and earth, it pictured to those primitive people the friendliness existing between God and man. Many nations have looked upon it as not merely one of the most beautiful and striking objects in nature, but as the messenger of heaven to men. And arching over the whole horizon, it exhibits the all-embracing universality of the promise. They accepted it as a sign that God has no pleasure in destruction, that He does not give way to moods, that He does not always chide, that if weeping may endure for a night joy is sure to follow. If any one is under a cloud, leading a joyless, hopeless, heartless life, if any one has much apparent reason to suppose that God has given

him up to catastrophe, and lets things run as they may, there is some satisfaction in reading this natural emblem and recognising that without the cloud, nay, without the cloud breaking into heavy sweeping rains, there cannot be the bow, and that no cloud of God's sending is permanent, but will one day give place to unclouded joy. Let the prayer of David be yours, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me. Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort according to Thy word unto Thy servant."

It may be felt that the matters about which God spoke to Noah were barely religious, certainly not spiritual. But to take God as our God in any one particular is to take Him as our God for all. If we can eat our daily bread as given to us by our Father in heaven, then we are heirs of the righteousness which is by faith. It is because we wait for some wonderful and out-of-the-way proofs that God is keeping faith with us that we so much lack a real and living faith. If you think of God only in connection with some spiritual difficulty, or if you are waiting for some critical spiritual experience about which you may deal with God,—if you are not transacting with Him about your daily work, about your temporal wants and difficulties, about your friendships and your tastes, about that which makes up the bulk of your thought, feeling, and action, then you have yet to learn what living with God means. You have yet to learn that God the Infinite Creator of all is present in all your life. We are not in advance of Noah, but behind him, if we cannot speak to God about common things.

Besides, the relation of man to God was sufficiently

determined by this covenant. When any man in that age began to ask himself the question which all men in all ages ask, How shall I win the favour of God? it must, or it might, at once have struck him, Why, God has already favoured me and has bound Himself to me by express and solemn pledges. And radically this is all that any one needs to know. It is not a change in God's attitude towards you that is required. What is required is that you believe what is actually the case, that the Holy God loves you already and is already seeking to bless you by making you like Himself. Believe that, and let the faith of it sink more and more deeply into your spirit, and you will find that you are saved from your sin.

What remains to be told of Noah is full of moral significance. Rare indeed is a *wholly* good man; and happy indeed is he who throughout his youth, his manhood, and his age lets principle govern all his actions. The righteous and rescued Noah lying drunk on his tent-floor is a sorrowful spectacle. God had given him the earth, and this was the use he made of the gift; melancholy presage of the fashion of his posterity. He had God to help him to bear his responsibilities, to refresh and gladden him; but he preferred the fruit of his vineyard. Can the most sacred or impressive memories secure a man against sin? Noah had the memory of a race drowned for sin and of a year in solitude with God. Can the dignity and weight of responsibility steady a man? This man knew that to him God had declared His purpose and that he only could carry it forward to fulfilment. In that heavy helpless figure, fallen insensible in his tent, is as significant a warning as in the Flood.

Noah's sin brings before us two facts about sin.

First, that the smaller temptations are often the most effectual. The man who is invulnerable on the field of battle amidst declared and strong enemies falls an easy prey to the assassin in his own home. When all the world was against him, Noah was able to face single-handed both scorn and violence, but in the midst of his vineyard, among his own people who understood him and needed no preaching or proof of his virtue, he relaxed.

He was no longer in circumstances so difficult as to force him to watch and pray, as to drive him to God's side. The temptations Noah had before known were mainly from without; he now learnt that those from within are more serious. Many of us find it comparatively easy to carry clean hands before the public, or to demean ourselves with tolerable seemliness in circumstances where the temptation may be very strong but is also very patent; but how careless are we often in our domestic life, and how little strain do we put upon ourselves in the company of those whom we can trust. What petulance and irritability, what angry and slanderous words, what sensuality and indolence could our own homes witness to! Noah is not the only man who has walked uprightly and kept his garment unspotted from the world so long as the eye of man was on him, but who has lain uncovered on his own tent-floor.

Secondly, we see here how a man may fall into new forms of sin, and are reminded especially of one of the most distressing facts to be observed in the world, viz., that men in their prime and even in their old age are sometimes overtaken in sins of sensuality from which hitherto they have kept themselves pure. We are very ready to think we know the full extent of

wickedness to which we may go; that by certain sins *we* shall never be much tempted. And in some of our predictions we may be correct; our temperament or our circumstances may absolutely preclude some sins from mastering us. Yet who has made but a slight alteration in his circumstances, added a little to his business, made some new family arrangements, or changed his residence, without being astonished to find how many new sources of evil seem to have been opened within him? While therefore you rejoice over sins defeated, beware of thinking your work is nearly done. Especially let those of us who have for years been fighting mainly against one sin beware of thinking that if only *that* were defeated we should be free from sin. As a man who has long suffered from one bodily disease congratulates himself that at least he knows what he may expect in the way of pain, and will not suffer as some other man he has heard of does suffer; whereas though one disease may kill others, yet some diseases only prepare the body for the assault of worse ailments than themselves, and the constitution at last breaks up under a combination of ills that make the sufferer a pity to his friends and a perplexity to his physicians. And so is it in the spirit; you cannot say that because you are so consumed by one infirmity, others can find no room in you. In short, there is nothing that can secure us against the unspeakable calamity of falling into new sins, except the direction given by our Lord, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." There *is need* of watching, else this precept had never been uttered; too many things absolutely needful for us to do have to be enjoined upon us to leave any room for the injunction of precepts that are unnecessary, and he who is not watching has no security that he shall not

sin so as to be a scandal to his friends and a shame to himself.

Noah's sin brought to light the character of his three sons—the coarse irreverence of Ham, the dignified delicacy and honour of Shem and Japheth. The bearing of men towards the sins of others is always a touchstone of character. The full exposure of sin where good is expected to come of the exposure and when it is done with sorrow and with shame is one thing, and the exposure of sin to create a laugh and merely to amuse is another. They are the true descendants of Ham, whether their faces be black or white, and whether they go with no clothes or with clothes that are the product of much thought and anxiety, who find pleasure in the mere contemplation of deeds of shame, in real life, on the boards of the theatre, in daily journals, or in works of fiction. Extremes meet, and the savage grossness of Ham is found in many who count themselves the last and finest product of culture. It is found also in the harder and narrower set of modern investigators, who glory in exposing the scientific weakness of our forefathers, and make a jest of the mistakes of men to whom they owe much of their freedom, and whose shoe latchet they are not worthy to tie, so far as the deeper moral qualities go.

But neither is religious society free from this same sin. The faults and mistakes and sins of others are talked over, possibly with some show of regret, but with, as we know, very little real shame and sadness, for these feelings prompt us, not to talk them over in companies where no good can be done in the way of remedy, but to cover them as these sorrowing sons of Noah, with averted eye and humbled head. Charity is the prime grace enjoined upon us and charity *covers* a multitude

of sins. And whatever excuses for exposing others we may make, however we may say it is only a love of truth and fair play that makes us drag to light the infirmities of a man whom others are praising, we may be very sure that if all *evil* motives were absent this kind of evil speaking would cease among us. But there is a malignity in sin that leaves its bitter root in us all, and causes us to be glad when those whom we have been regarding as our superiors are reduced to our poor level. And there is a cowardliness in sin which cannot bear to be alone, and eagerly hails every symptom of others being in the same condemnation.

Before exposing another, think first whether your own conduct could bear a similar treatment, whether you have never done the thing you desire to conceal, said the thing you would blush to hear repeated, or thought the thought you could not bear another to read. And if you be a Christian, does it not become you to remember what you yourself have learnt of the slipperiness of this world's ways, of your liability to fall, of your sudden exposure to sin from some physical disorder, or some slight mistake which greatly extenuates your sin, but which you could not plead before another? And do you know nothing of the difficulty of conquering one sin that is rooted in your constitution, and the strife that goes on in a man's own soul and in secret though he show little immediate fruit of it in his life before men? Surely it becomes us to give a man credit for much good resolution and much sore self-denial and endeavour, even when he fails and sins still, because such we know to be our own case, and if we disbelieve in others until they can walk with perfect rectitude, if we condemn them for one or two flaws and

blemishes, we shall be tempted to show the same want of charity towards ourselves, and fall at length into that miserable and hopeless condition that believes in no regenerating spirit nor in any holiness attainable by us

CHAPTER VII.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM.

GENESIS xi. 27—xii. 5.

WITH Abraham there opens a new chapter in the history of the race; a chapter of the profoundest significance. The consequences of Abraham's movements and beliefs have been limitless and enduring. All succeeding time has been influenced by him. And yet there is in his life a remarkable simplicity, and an entire absence of such events as impress contemporaries. Among all the forgotten millions of his own time he stands alone a recognisable and memorable figure. But around his figure there gathers no throng of armed followers; with his name, no vast territorial dominion, no new legislation, not even any work of literature or art is associated. The significance of his life was not military, nor legislative, nor literary, but religious. To him must be carried back the belief in one God. We find him born and brought up among idolaters; and although it is certain there were others besides himself who here and there upon earth had dimly arrived at the same belief as he, yet it is certainly from him the Monotheistic belief has been diffused. Since his day the world has never been without its explicit advocacy. It is his belief in the true God, in a God who manifested His existence and

His nature by responding to this belief, it is this belief and the place he gave it as the regulating principle of all his movements and thoughts, that have given him his everlasting influence.

With Abraham there is also introduced the first step in a new method adopted by God in the training of men. The dispersion of men and the divergence of their languages are now seen to have been the necessary preliminary to this new step in the education of the world—the fencing round of one people till they should learn to know God and understand and exemplify His government. It is true, God reveals Himself to all men and governs all; but by selecting one race with special adaptations, and by giving to it a special training, God might more securely and more rapidly reveal Himself to all. Each nation has certain characteristics, a national character which grows by seclusion from the influences which are forming other races. There is a certain mental and moral individuality stamped upon every separate people. Nothing is more certainly retained; nothing more certainly handed down from generation to generation. It would therefore be a good practical means of conserving and deepening the knowledge of God, if it were made the national interest of a people to preserve it, and if it were closely identified with the national characteristics. This was the method adopted by God. He meant to combine allegiance to Himself with national advantages, and spiritual with national character, and separation in belief with a distinctly outlined and defensible territory.

This method, in common with all Divine methods, was in strict keeping with the natural evolution of history. The migration of Abraham occurred in the

epoch of migrations. But although for centuries before Abraham new nations had been forming, none of them had belief in God as its formative principle. Wave upon wave of warriors, shepherds, colonists have left the prolific plains of Mesopotamia. Swarm after swarm has left that busy hive, pushing one another further and further west and east, but all have been urged by natural impulses, by hunger, commerce, love of adventure and conquest. By natural likings and dislikings, by policy, and by dint of force the multitudinous tribes of men were finding their places in the world, the weaker being driven to the hills, and being schooled there by hard living till their descendants came down and conquered their conquerors. All this went on without regard to any very high motives. As it was with the Goths who invaded Italy for her wealth, as it is now with those who people America and Africa because there is land or room enough, so it was then. But at last God selects one man and says, "*I* will make of thee a great nation." The origin of this nation is not facile love of change nor lust of territory, but belief in God. Without this belief this people had not been. No other account can be given of its origin. Abraham is himself already the member of a tribe, well-off and likely to be well-off; he has no large family to provide for, but he is separated from his kindred and country, and led out to be himself a new beginning, and this because, as he himself throughout his life said, he heard God's call and responded to it.

The city which claims the distinction of being Abraham's birthplace, or at least of giving its name to the district where he was born, is now represented by a few mounds of ruins rising out of the flat marshy ground on the western bank of the Euphrates, not far

above the point where it joins its waters to those of the Tigris and glides on to the Persian gulf. In the time of Abraham, Ur was the capital city which gave its name to one of the most populous and fertile regions of the earth. The whole land of Accad which ran up from the sea-coast to Upper Mesopotamia (or Shinar) seems to have been known as Ur-ma, the land of Ur. This land was of no great extent, being little if at all larger than Scotland, but it was the richest of Asia. The high civilisation which this land enjoyed even in the time of Abraham has been disclosed in the abundant and multifarious Babylonian remains which have recently been brought to light.

What induced Terah to abandon so prosperous a land can only be conjectured. It is possible that the idolatrous customs of the inhabitants may have had something to do with his movements. For while the ancient Babylonian records reveal a civilisation surprisingly advanced, and a social order in some respects admirable, they also make disclosures regarding the worship of the gods which must shock even those who are familiar with the immoralities frequently fostered by heathen religions. The city of Ur was not only the capital, it was the holy city of the Chaldeans. In its northern quarter rose high above the surrounding buildings the successive stages of the temple of the moon-god, culminating in a platform on which the priests could both accurately observe the motions of the stars and hold their night-watches in honour of their god. In the courts of this temple might be heard breaking the silence of midnight, one of those magnificent hymns, still preserved, in which idolatry is seen in its most attractive dress, and in which the Lord of Ur is invoked in terms not unworthy of the living God.

But in these same temple-courts Abraham may have seen the firstborn led to the altar, the fruit of the body sacrificed to atone for the sin of the soul; and here too he must have seen other sights even more shocking and repulsive. Here he was no doubt taught that strangely mixed religion which clung for generations to some members of his family. Certainly he was taught in common with the whole community to rest on the seventh day; as he was trained to look to the stars with reverence and to the moon as something more than the light which was set to rule the night.

Possibly then Terah may have been induced to move northwards by a desire to shake himself free from customs he disapproved. The Hebrews themselves seem always to have considered that his migration had a religious motive. "This people," says one of their old writings, "is descended from the Chaldeans, and they sojourned heretofore in Mesopotamia because they would not follow the gods of their fathers which were in the land of Chaldea. For they left the way of their ancestors and worshipped the God of heaven, the God whom they knew; so they cast them out from the face of their gods, and they fled into Mesopotamia and sojourned there many days. Then their God commanded them to depart from the place where they sojourned and to go into the land of Canaan." But if this is a true account of the origin of the movement northwards, it must have been Abraham rather than his father who was the moving spirit of it; for it is certainly Abraham and not Terah who stands as the significant figure inaugurating the new era.

If doubt rests on the moving cause of the migration from Ur, none rests on that which prompted Abraham to leave Charran and journey towards Canaan. He

did so in obedience to what he believed to be a Divine command, and in faith on what he understood to be a Divine promise. How he became aware that a Divine command thus lay upon him we do not know. Nothing could persuade him that he was not commanded. Day by day he heard in his soul what he recognised as a Divine voice, saying: "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee!" This was God's first revelation of Himself to Abraham. Up to this time Abraham to all appearance had no knowledge of any God but the deities worshipped by his fathers in Chaldea. Now, he finds within himself impulses which he cannot resist and which he is conscious he ought not to resist. He believes it to be his duty to adopt a course which may look foolish and which he can justify only by saying that his conscience bids him. He recognises, apparently for the first time, that through his conscience there speaks to him a God Who is supreme. In dependence on this God he gathered his possessions together and departed.

So far, one may be tempted to say, no very unusual faith was required. Many a poor girl has followed a weakly brother or a dissipated father to Australia or the wild west of America; many a lad has gone to the deadly west coast of Africa with no such prospects as Abraham. For Abraham had the double prospect which makes migration desirable. Assure the colonist that he will find land and have strong sons to till and hold and leave it to, and you give him all the motive he requires. These were the promises made to Abraham—a land and a seed. Neither was there at this period much difficulty in believing that both promises would be fulfilled. The land he no doubt expected to find

in some unoccupied territory. And as regards the children, he had not yet faced the condition that only through Sarah was this part of the promise to be fulfilled.

But the peculiarity in Abraham's abandonment of present certainties for the sake of a future and unseen good is, that it was prompted not by family affection or greed or an adventurous disposition, but by faith in a God Whom no one but himself recognised. It was the first step in a life-long adherence to an Invisible, Spiritual Supreme. It was that first step which committed him to life-long dependence upon and intercourse with One Who had authority to regulate his movements and power to bless him. From this time forth all that he sought in life was the fulfilment of God's promise. He staked his future upon God's existence and faithfulness. Had Abraham abandoned Charran at the command of a widely ruling monarch who promised him ample compensation, no record would have been made of so ordinary a transaction. But this was an entirely new thing and well worth recording, that a man should leave country and kindred and seek an unknown land under the impression that thus he was obeying the command of the unseen God. While others worshipped sun, moon, and stars, and recognised the Divine in their brilliance and power, in their exaltation above earth and control of earth and its life, Abraham saw that there was something greater than the order of nature and more worthy of worship, even the still small voice that spoke within his own conscience of right and wrong in human conduct, and that told him how his own life must be ordered. While all around him were bowing down to the heavenly host and sacrificing to them the highest things in human

nature, he heard a voice falling from these shining ministers of God's will, which said to him, "See thou do it not, for we are thy fellow-servants; worship thou God!" This was the triumph of the spiritual over the material; the acknowledgment that in God there is something greater than can be found in nature; that man finds his true affinity not in the things that are seen but in the unseen Spirit that is over all. It is this that gives to the figure of Abraham its simple grandeur and its permanent significance.

Under the simple statement "The Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country," there are probably hidden years of questioning and meditation. God's revelation of Himself to Abram in all probability did not take the determinate form of articulate command without having passed through many preliminary stages of surmise and doubt and mental conflict. But once assured that God is calling him, Abraham responds quickly and resolutely. The revelation has come to a mind in which it will not be lost. As one of the few theologians who have paid attention to the method of revelation has said: "A Divine revelation does not dispense with a certain character and certain qualities of mind in the person who is the instrument of it. A man who throws off the chains of authority and association must be a man of extraordinary independence and strength of mind, although he does so in obedience to a Divine revelation; because no miracle, no sign or wonder which accompanies a revelation can by its simple stroke force human nature from the innate hold of custom and the adhesion to and fear of established opinion; can enable it to confront the frowns of men, and take up truth opposed to general prejudice, except there is in the man himself, who is the reci-

pient of the revelation, a certain strength of mind and independence which concurs with the Divine intention."

That Abraham's faith triumphed over exceptional difficulties and enabled him to do what no other motive would have been strong enough to accomplish, there is therefore no call to assert. During his after-life his faith was severely tried, but the mere abandonment of his country in the hope of gaining a better was the ordinary motive of his day. It was the *ground* of this hope, the belief in God, which made Abraham's conduct original and fruitful. That sufficient inducement was presented to him is only to say that God is reasonable. There is always sufficient inducement to obey God; because life is reasonable. No man was ever commanded or required to do anything which it was not for his advantage to do. Sin is a mistake. But so weak are we, so liable to be moved by the things present to us and by the desire for immediate gratification, that it never ceases to be wonderful and admirable when a sense of duty enables a man to forego present advantage and to believe that present loss is the needful preliminary of eternal gain.

Abraham's faith is chosen by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews as an apt illustration of his definition of Faith, that it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." One property of faith is that it gives to things future and which are as yet only hoped for all the reality of actual present existence. Future things may be said to have no existence for those who do not believe in them. They are not taken into account. Men do not shape their conduct with any reference to them. But when a man believes in certain events that are to be, this faith of his lends to these future things the reality, the "substance" which

things actually existing in the present have. They have the same weight with him, the same influence upon his conduct.

Without some power to realize the future and to take account of what is to be as well as of what already is, we could not carry on the common affairs of life. And success in life very greatly depends on foresight, or the power to see clearly what is to be and give it due weight. The man who has no foresight makes his plans, but being unable to apprehend the future his plans are disconcerted. Indeed it is one of the most valuable gifts a man can have, to be able to say with tolerable accuracy what is to happen and what is not; to be able to sift rumours, common talk, popular impressions, probabilities, chances, and to be able to feel sure what the future will really be; to be able to weigh the character and commercial prospects of the men he deals with, so as to see what must be the issue of their operations and whom he may trust. Many of our most serious mistakes in life arise from our inability to imagine the consequences of our actions and to forefeel how these consequences will affect us.

Now faith largely supplies the want of this imaginative foresight. It lends substance to things future. It believes the account given of the future by a trustworthy authority. In many ordinary matters all men are dependent on the testimony of others for their knowledge of the result of certain operations. The astronomer, the physiologist, the navigator, each has his department within which his predictions are accepted as authoritative. But for what is beyond the ken of science no faith in our fellow-men avails. Feeling that if there is a life beyond the grave, it must have important bearings on the present, we have yet no

data by which to calculate what will then be, or only data so difficult to use that our calculations are but guesswork. But faith accepts the testimony of God as unhesitatingly as that of man and gives reality to the future He describes and promises. It believes that the life God calls us to is a better life, and it enters upon it. It believes that there is a world to come in which all things are new and all things eternal; and, so believing, it cannot but feel less anxious to cling to this world's goods. That which embitters all loss and deepens sorrow is the feeling that this world is all; but faith makes eternity as real as time and gives substantial existence to that new and limitless future in which we shall have time to forget the sorrows and live past the losses of this present world.

The radical elements of greatness are identical from age to age, and the primal duties which no good man can evade do not vary as the world grows older. What we admire in Abraham we feel to be incumbent on ourselves. Indeed the uniform call of Christ to all His followers is even in form almost identical with that which stirred Abraham, and made him the father of the faithful. "Follow Me," says our Lord, "and every one that forsaketh houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." And there is something perennially edifying in the spectacle of a man who believes that God has a place and a use for him in the world, and who puts himself at God's disposal; who enters upon life refusing to be bound by the circumstances of his upbringing, by the expectations of his friends, by prevailing customs, by prospect of gain and advancement among men; and resolved to

listen to the highest voice of all, to discover what God has for him to do upon earth and where he is likely to find most of God; who virtually and with deepest sincerity says, Let God choose my destination: I have good land here, but if God wishes me elsewhere, elsewhere I go: who, in one word, believes in the call of God to himself, who admits it into the springs of his conduct, and recognises that for him also the highest life his conscience can suggest is the only life he can live, no matter how cumbrous and troublesome and expensive be the changes involved in entering it. Let the spectacle take hold of your imagination—the spectacle of a man believing that there is something more akin to himself and higher than the material life and the great laws that govern it, and going calmly and hopefully forward into the unknown, because he knows that God is with him, that in God is our true life, that man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God.

Even thus then may we bring our faith to a true and reliable test. All men who have a confident expectation of future good make sacrifices or run risks to obtain it. Mercantile life proceeds on the understanding that such ventures are reasonable and will always be made. Men might if they liked spend their money on present pleasure, but they rarely do so. They prefer to put it into concerns or transactions from which they expect to reap large returns. They have faith and as a necessary consequence they make ventures. So did these Hebrews—they ran a great risk, they gave up the sole means of livelihood they had any experience of and entered what they knew to be a bare desert, because they believed in the land that lay beyond and in God's promise. What then has your

faith done? What have you ventured that you would not have ventured but for God's promise? Suppose Christ's promise failed, in what would you be the losers? Of course you would lose what you call your hope of heaven—but what would you find you had lost in this world? When a merchant's ships are wrecked or when his investment turns out bad, he loses not only the gain he hoped for, but the means he risked. Suppose then Christ were declared bankrupt, unable to fulfil your expectations, would you really find that you had ventured so much upon His promise that you are deeply involved in His bankruptcy, and are much worse off in this world and now than you would otherwise have been? Or may I not use the words of one of the most cautious and charitable of men, and say, "I really fear, when we come to examine, it will be found that there is nothing we resolve, nothing we do, nothing we do not do, nothing we avoid, nothing we choose, nothing we give up, nothing we pursue, which we should not resolve, and do, and not do, and avoid, and choose, and give up, and pursue, if Christ had not died and heaven were not promised us." If this be the case—if you would be neither much better nor much worse though Christianity were a fable—if you have in nothing become poorer in this world that your reward in heaven may be greater, if you have made no investments and run no risks, then really the natural inference is that your faith in the future inheritance is small. Barnabas sold his Cyprus property because he believed heaven was his, and his bit of land suddenly became a small consideration; useful only in so far as he could with the mammon of unrighteousness make himself a mansion in heaven. Paul gave up his prospects of advancement in the nation, of which he would

of course as certainly have become the leader and first man as he took that position in the Church, and plainly tells us that having made so large a venture on Christ's word, he would if this word failed be a great loser, of all men most miserable because he had risked his all *in this life* on it. People sometimes take offence at Paul's plain way of speaking of the sacrifices he had made, and of Peter's plain way of saying "we have left all and followed Thee, what shall we have therefore?" but when people have made sacrifices they know it and can specify them, and a faith that makes no sacrifices is no good either in this world's affairs or in religion. Self-consciousness may not be a very good thing: but self-deception is a worse.

Here as elsewhere a clear hope sprang from faith. Recognising God, Abraham knew that there was for men a great future. He looked forward to a time when all men should believe as he did, and in him all families of the earth be blessed. No doubt in these early days when all men were on the move and striving to make a name and a place for themselves, an onward look might be common. But the far-reaching extent, the certainty, and the definiteness of Abraham's view of the future were unexampled. There far back in the hazy dawn he stood while the morning mists hid the horizon from every other eye, and he alone discerns what is to be. One clear voice and one only rings out in unfaltering tones and from amidst the babel of voices that utter either amazing follies or misdirected yearnings, gives the one true forecast and direction—the one living word which has separated itself from and survived all the prognostications of Chaldean sooth-sayers and priests of Ur, because it has never ceased to give life to men. It has created for itself a channel

and you can trace it through the centuries by the living green of its banks and the life it gives as it goes. For this hope of Abraham has been fulfilled; the creed and its accompanying blessing which that day lived in the heart of one man only has brought blessing to all the families of the earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

ABRAM IN EGYPT.

GENESIS xii. 6-20.

ABRAM still journeying southward and not as yet knowing where his shifting camp was finally to be pitched, came at last to what may be called the heart of Palestine, the rich district of Shechem. Here stood the oak of Moreh, a well-known landmark and favourite meeting-place. In after years every meadow in this plain was owned and occupied, every vineyard on the slopes of Ebal fenced off, every square yard specified in some title-deed. But as yet the country seems not to have been densely populated. There was room for a caravan like Abram's to move freely through the country, liberty for a far-stretching encampment such as his to occupy the lovely vale that lies between Ebal and Gerizim. As he rested here and enjoyed the abundant pasture, or as he viewed the land from one of the neighbouring hills, the Lord appeared to him and made him aware that this was the land designed for him. Here accordingly under the spreading oak round whose boughs had often clung the smoke of idolatrous sacrifice, Abram erects an altar to the living God in devout acceptance of the gift, taking possession as it were of the land jointly for God and for himself. Little harm will come of worldly possessions so taken and so held

As Abram traversed the land, wondering what were the limits of his inheritance, it may have seemed far too large for his household. Soon he experiences a difficulty of quite the opposite kind; he is unable to find in it sustenance for his followers. Any notion that God's friendship would raise him above the touch of such troubles as were incident to the times, places, and circumstances in which his life was to be spent, is quickly dispelled. The children of God are not exempt from any of the common calamities; they are only expected and aided to be calmer and wiser in their endurance and use of them. That we suffer the same hardships as all other men is no proof that we are not eternally associated with God, and ought never to persuade us our faith has been in vain.

Abram, as he looked at the bare, brown, cracked pastures and at the dry watercourses filled only with stones, thought of the ever-fresh plains of Mesopotamia, the lovely gardens of Damascus, the rich pasturage of the northern borders of Canaan; but he knew enough of his own heart to make him very careful lest these remembrances should make him turn back. No doubt he had come to the promised land expecting it to be the real Utopia, the Paradise which had haunted his thoughts as he lay among the hills of Ur watching his flocks under the brilliant midnight sky. No doubt he expected that here all would be easy and bright, peaceful and luxurious. His first experience is of famine. He has to look on his herd melting away, his favourite cattle losing their appearance, his servants murmuring and obliged to scatter. In his dreams he must have night after night seen the old country, the green breadth of the land that Euphrates watered, the heavy headed corn bending before the warm airs of his native land;

but morning by morning he wakes to the same anxieties, to the sad reality of parched and burnt-up pastures, shepherds hanging about with gloomy looks, his own heart distressed and failing. He was also a stranger here who could not look for the help an old resident might have counted on. It was probably years since God had made any sign to him. Was the promised land worth having after all? Might he not be better off among his old friends in Charran? Should he not brave their ridicule and return? He will not so much as make it possible to return. He will not even for temporary relief go north towards his old country, but will go to Egypt, where he cannot stay, and from which he must return to Canaan.

Here, then, is a man who plainly believes that God's promise cannot fail; that God will magnify His promise, and that it above all else is worth waiting for. He believes that the man who seeks without flinching and through all disappointment and bareness to do God's will, shall one day have an abundantly satisfying reward, and that meanwhile association with God in carrying forward His abiding purposes with men is more for a man to live upon than the cattle upon a thousand hills. And thus famine rendered to Abram no small service if it quickened within him the consciousness that the call of God was not to ease and prosperity, to land-owning and cattle-breeding, but to be God's agent on earth for the fulfilment of remote but magnificent purposes. His life might seem to be down among the commonplace vicissitudes, pasture might fail, and his well-stocked camp melt away, but out of his mind there could not fade the future God had revealed to him. If it had been his ambition to give his name to a tribe and be known as a wide-ruling chief, that ambition is now eclipsed by

his desire to be a step towards the fulfilment of that real end for which the whole world is. The belief that God has called him to do His work has lifted him above concern about personal matters; life has taken a new meaning in his eyes by its connection with the Eternal.

The extraordinary country to which Abram betook himself, and which was destined to exercise so profound an influence on his descendants, had even at this early date attained a high degree of civilisation. The origin of this civilisation is shrouded in obscurity, as the source of the great river to which the country owes its prosperity for many centuries kept the secret of its birth. As yet scholars are unable to tell us with certainty what Pharaoh was on the throne when Abram went down into Egypt. The monuments have preserved the effigies of two distinct types of rulers; the one simple, kindly, sensible, stately, handsome, fearless, as of men long accustomed to the throne. These are the faces of the native Egyptian rulers. The other type of face is heavy and massive, proud and strong but full of care, with neither the handsome features nor the look of kindliness and culture which belong to the other. These are the faces of the famous Shepherd kings who held Egypt in subjection, probably at the very time when Abram was in the land.

For our purposes it matters little whether Abram's visit occurred while the country was under native or under foreign rule, for long before the Shepherd kings entered Egypt it enjoyed a complete and stable civilisation. Whatever dynasty Abram found on the throne, he certainly found among the people a more refined social life than he had seen in his native city, a much purer religion, and a much more highly developed moral code. He must have kept himself entirely aloof from

Egyptian society if he failed to discover that they believed in a judgment after death, and that this judgment proceeded upon a severe moral code. Before admission into the Egyptian heaven the deceased must swear that "he has not stolen nor slain any one intentionally; that he has not allowed his devotions to be seen; that he has not been guilty of hypocrisy or lying; that he has not calumniated any one nor fallen into drunkenness or adultery; that he has not turned away his ear from the words of truth; that he has been no idle talker; that he has not slighted the king or his father." To a man in Abram's state of mind the Egyptian creed and customs must have conveyed many valuable suggestions.

But virtuous as in many respects the Egyptians were, Abram's fears as he approached their country were by no means groundless. The event proved that whatever Sarah's age and appearance at this time were, his fears were something more than the fruit of a husband's partiality. Possibly he may have heard the ugly story which has recently been deciphered from an old papyrus, and which tells how one of the Pharaohs, acting on the advice of his princes, sent armed men to fetch a beautiful woman and make away with her husband. But knowing the risk he ran, why did he go? He contemplated the possibility of Sarah's being taken from him; but, if this should happen, what became of the promised seed? We cannot suppose that, driven by famine from the promised land, he had lost all hope regarding the fulfilment of the other part of the promise. Probably his idea was that some of the great men might take a fancy to Sarah, and that he would so temporise with them and ask for her such large gifts as would hold them off for a while until he could

provide for his people and get clear out of the land. It had not occurred to him that she might be taken to the palace. Whatever his idea of the probable course of events was, his proposal to guide them by disguising his true relationship to Sarah was unjustifiable. And his feelings during these weeks in Egypt must have been far from enviable as he learned that of all virtues the Egyptians set greatest store by truth, and that lying was the vice they held in greatest abhorrence.

Here then was the whole promise and purpose of God in a most precarious position; the land abandoned, the mother of the promised seed in a harem through whose guards no force on earth could penetrate. Abram could do nothing but go helplessly about, thinking what a fool he had been, and wishing himself well back among the parched hills of Bethel. Suddenly there is a panic in the royal household; and Pharaoh is made aware that he was on the brink of what he himself considered a great sin. Besides effecting its immediate purpose, this visitation might have taught Pharaoh that a man cannot safely sin within limits prescribed by himself. He had not intended such evil as he found himself just saved from committing. But had he lived with perfect purity, this liability to fall into transgression, shocking to himself, could not have existed. Many sins of most painful consequence we commit, not of deliberate purpose, but because our previous life has been careless and lacking in moral tone. We are mistaken if we suppose that we can sin within a certain safe circle and never go beyond it.

By this intervention on God's part Abram was saved from the consequences of his own scheme, but he was not saved from the indignant rebuke of the Egyptian monarch. This rebuke indeed did not prevent him

from a repetition of the same conduct in another country, conduct which was met with similar indignation: "What have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom this great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. What sawest thou that thou hast done this thing?" This rebuke did not seem to sink deeply into the conscience of Abram's descendants, for the Jewish history is full of instances in which leading men do not shrink from manœuvre, deceit and lying. Yet it is impossible to suppose that Abram's conception of God was not vastly enlarged by this incident, and this especially in two particulars.

(1) Abram must have received a new impression regarding God's truth. It would seem that as yet he had no very clear idea of God's holiness. He had the idea of God which Mohammedans entertain, and past which they seem unable to get. He conceived of God as the Supreme Ruler; he had a firm belief in the unity of God and probably a hatred of idolatry and a profound contempt for idolaters. He believed that this Supreme God could always and easily accomplish His will, and that the voice that inwardly guided him was the voice of God. His own character had not yet been deepened and dignified by prolonged intercourse with God and by close observation of His actual ways; and so as yet he knows little of what constitutes the true glory of God.

For learning that truth is an essential attribute of God he could not have gone to a better school than Egypt. His own reliance on God's promise might have been expected to produce in him a high esteem for truth and a clear recognition of its essential place in the Divine character. Apparently it had only partially had this effect. The heathen, therefore, must teach him Had not Abram seen the look of indignation and injury

on the face of Pharaoh, he might have left the land feeling that his scheme had succeeded admirably. But as he went at the head of his vastly increased household, the envy of many who saw his long train of camels and cattle, he would have given up all could he have blotted from his mind's eye the reproachful face of Pharaoh and nipped out this entire episode from his life. He was humbled both by his falseness and his foolishness. He had told a lie, and told it when truth would have served him better. For the very precaution he took in passing off Sarai as his sister was precisely what encouraged Pharaoh to take her, and produced the whole misadventure. It was the heathen monarch who taught the father of the faithful his first lesson in God's holiness.

What he so painfully learned we must all learn, that God does not need lying for the attainment of His ends, and that double-dealing is always short-sighted and the proper precursor of shame. Frequently men are tempted like Abram to seek a God-protected and God-prospered life by conduct that is not thoroughly straightforward. Some of us who statedly ask God to bless our endeavours, and who have no doubt that God approves the ends we seek to accomplish, do yet adopt such means of attaining our ends as not even men with any high sense of honour would countenance. To save ourselves from trouble, inconvenience, or danger, we are tempted to evasions and shifts which are not free from guilt. The more one sees of life, the higher value does he set on truth. Let lying be called by whatever flattering title men please—let it pass for diplomacy, smartness, self-defence, policy, or civility—it remains the device of the coward, the absolute bar to free and healthy intercourse, a vice which diffuses itself through the whole

character and makes growth impossible. Trade and commerce are always hampered and retarded, and often overwhelmed in disaster, by the determined and deliberate doubleness of those who engage in them; charity is minimised and withheld from its proper objects by the suspiciousness engendered in us by the almost universal falseness of men; and the habit of making things seem to others what they are not, reacts upon the man himself and makes it difficult for him to feel the abiding effective reality of anything he has to do with or even of his own soul. If then we are to know the living and true God we must ourselves be true, transparent, and living in the light as He is the Light. If we are to reach His ends we must adopt His means and abjure all crafty contrivances of our own. If we are to be His heirs and partners in the work of the world, we must first be His children, and show that we have attained our majority by manifesting an indubitable resemblance to His own clear truth.

(2) But whether Abram fully learned this lesson or not, there can be little doubt that at this time he did receive fresh and abiding impressions of God's faithfulness and sufficiency. In Abram's first response to God's call he exhibited a remarkable independence and strength of character His abandonment of home and kindred on account of a religious faith which he alone possessed, was the act of a man who relied much more on himself than on others and who had the courage of his convictions. This qualification for playing a great part in human affairs he undoubtedly had. But he had also the defects of his qualities. A weaker man would have shrunk from going into Egypt and would have preferred to see his flocks dwindle rather than take so venturesome a step. No such hesitations could trammel

Abram's movements. He felt himself equal to all occasions. That part of his character which was reproduced in his grandson Jacob, a readiness to rise to every emergency that called for management and diplomacy, an aptitude for dealing with men and using them for his purposes—this came to the front now! To all the timorous suggestions of his household he had one reply: Leave it all to me; I will bring you through. So he entered Egypt confident that single-handed he could cope with their Pharaohs, priests, magicians, guards, judges, warriors; and find his way through the finely-meshed net that held and examined every person and action in the land.

He left Egypt in a much more healthy state of mind, practically convinced of his own inability to work his way to the happiness God had promised him, and equally convinced of God's faithfulness and power to bring him through all the embarrassments and disasters into which his own folly and sin might bring him. His own confidence and management had placed God's promise in a position of extreme hazard; and without the intervention of God Abram saw that he could neither recover the mother of the promised seed nor return to the land of promise. Abram is put to shame even in the eyes of his household slaves; and with what burning shame must he have stood before Sarai and Pharaoh, and received back his wife from him whose wickedness he had feared, but who so far from meaning to sin as Abram suspected, was indignant that Abram should have made it even possible. He returned to Canaan humbled and very little disposed to feel confident in his own powers of managing in emergencies; but quite assured that God might at all times be relied on. He was convinced that God was not

depending upon him, but he upon God. He saw that God did not trust to his cleverness and craft, no, nor even to his willingness to do and endure God's will, but that He was trusting in Himself, and that by His faithfulness to His own promise, by His watchfulness and providence, He would bring Abram through all the entanglements caused by his own poor ideas of the best way to work out God's ends and attain to His blessing. He saw, in a word, that the future of the world lay not with Abram but with God.

This certainly was a great and needful step in the knowledge of God. Thus early and thus unmistakably was man taught in how profound and comprehensive a sense God is his Saviour. Commonly it takes a man a long time to learn that it is God who is saving him, but one day he learns it. He learns that it is not his own faith but God's faithfulness that saves him. He perceives that he needs God throughout, from first to last; not only to make him offers, but to enable him to accept them; not only to incline him to accept them to-day, but to maintain within him at all times this same inclination. He learns that God not only makes him a promise and leaves him to find his own way to what is promised; but that He is with him always, disentangling him day by day from the results of his own folly and securing for him not only possible but actual blessedness.

Few discoveries are so welcome and gladdening to the soul. Few give us the same sense of God's nearness and sovereignty; few make us feel so deeply the dignity and importance of our own salvation and career. This is God's affair; a matter in which are involved not merely our personal interests, but God's responsibility and purposes. God calls us to be His,

and He does not send us a-warring on our own charges, but throughout furnishes us with *everything* we need. When we go down to Egypt, when we quite diverge from the path that leads to the promised land and worldly straits tempt us to turn our back upon God's altar and seek relief by our own arrangements and devices, when we forget for a while how God has identified our interests with His own and tacitly abjure the vows we have silently registered before Him, even then He follows us and watches over us and lays His hand upon us and bids us back. And this only is our hope. Not in any determination of our own to cleave to Him and to live in faith on His promise can we trust. If we have this determination, let us cherish it, for this is God's present means of leading us onwards. But should this determination fail, the shame with which you recognise your want of steadfastness may prove a stronger bond to hold you to Him than the bold confidence with which to-day you view the future. The waywardness, the foolishness, the obstinate depravity that cause you to despair, God will conquer. With untiring patience, with all-foreseeing love, He stands by you and will bring you through. His gifts and calling are without repentance.

IX.

LOT'S SEPARATION FROM ABRAM.

GENESIS xiii.

ABRAM left Egypt thinking meanly of himself highly of God. This humble frame of mind is disclosed in the route he chooses; he went straight back "unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, unto the altar which he had made there at the first." With a childlike simplicity he seems to own that his visit to Egypt had been a mistake. He had gone there supposing that he was thrown upon his own resources, and that in order to keep himself and his dependants alive he must have recourse to craft and dishonesty. By retracing his steps and returning to the altar at Bethel, he seems to acknowledge that he should have remained there through the famine in dependence on God.

Whoever has attempted a similar practical repentance, visible to his own household and affecting their place of abode or daily occupations, will know how to estimate the candour and courage of Abram. To own that some distinctly marked portion of our life, upon which we entered with great confidence in our own wisdom and capacity, has come to nothing and has betrayed us into reprehensible conduct, is mortifying indeed. To admit that we have erred and to repair

our error by returning to our old way and practice, is what few of us have the courage to do. If we have entered on some branch of business or gone into some attractive speculation, or if we have altered our demeanour towards some friend, and if we are finding that we are thereby tempted to doubleness, to equivocation, to injustice, our only hope lies in a candid and straightforward repentance, in a manly and open return to the state of things that existed in happier days and which we should never have abandoned. Sometimes we are aware that a blight began to fall on our spiritual life from a particular date, and we can easily and distinctly trace an unhealthy habit of spirit to a well-marked passage in our outward career; but we shrink from the sacrifice and shame involved in a thoroughgoing restoration of the old state of things. We are always so ready to fancy we have done enough, if we get one heartfelt word of confession uttered; so ready, if we merely turn our faces towards God, to think our restoration complete. Let us make a point of getting through mere beginnings of repentance, mere intention to recover God's favour and a sound condition of life, and let us return and return till we bow at God's very altar again, and know that His hand is laid upon us in blessing as at the first.

Out of Egypt Abram brought vastly increased wealth. Each time he encamped, quite a town of black tents quickly rose round the spot where his fixed spear gave the signal for halting. And along with him there journeyed his nephew, apparently of almost equal, or at least considerable wealth; not dependent on Abram, nor even a partner with him, for "Lot also had flocks and herds and tents." So rapidly was their substance increasing that no sooner did they become stationary

than they found that the land was not able to furnish them with sufficient pasture. The Canaanite and the Perizzite would not allow them unlimited pasture in the neighbourhood of Bethel; and as the inevitable result of this the rival shepherds, eager to secure the best pasture for their own flocks and the best wells for their own cattle and camels, came to high words and probably to blows about their respective rights.

To both Abram and Lot it must have occurred that this competition between relatives was unseemly, and that some arrangement must be come to. And when at last some unusually blunt quarrel took place in presence of the chiefs, Abram divulges to Lot the scheme which had suggested itself to him. This state of things, he says, must come to an end; it is unseemly, unwise, and unrighteous. And as they walk on out of the circle of tents to discuss the matter without interruption, they come to a rising ground where the wide prospect brings them naturally to a pause. Abram looking north and south and seeing with the trained eye of a large flock-master that there was abundant pasture for both, turns to Lot with a final proposal: "Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

Thus early did wealth produce quarrelling among relatives. The men who had shared one another's fortunes while comparatively poor, no sooner become wealthy than they have to separate. Abram prevented quarrel by separation. "Let us," he says, "come to an understanding. And rather than be separate in heart, let us be separate in habitation." It is always a sorrowful time in family history when it comes to

this, that those who have had a common purse and have not been careful to know what exactly is theirs and what belongs to the other members of the family, have at last to make a division and to be as precise and documentary as if dealing with strangers. It is always painful to be compelled to own that law can be more trusted than love, and that legal forms are a surer barrier against quarrelling than brotherly kindness. It is a confession we are sometimes compelled to make, but never without a mixture of regret and shame.

As yet the character of Lot has not been exhibited, and we can only calculate from the relation he bears to Abram what his answer to the proposal will probably be. We know that Abram has been the making of his nephew, and that the land belongs to Abram; and we should expect that in common decency Lot would set aside the generous offer of his uncle and demand that he only should determine the matter. "It is not for me to make choice in a land which is wholly yours. My future does not carry in it the import of yours. It is a small matter what kind of subsistence I secure or where I find it. Choose for yourself, and allot to me what is right." We see here what a safeguard of happiness in life right feeling is. To be in right and pleasant relations with the persons around us will save us from error and sin even when conscience and judgment give no certain decision. The heart which feels gratitude is beyond the need of being schooled and compelled to do justly. To the man who is affectionately disposed it is superfluous to insist upon the rights of other persons. The instinct which tells a man what is due to others and makes him sensitive to their wrongs will preserve him from many an ignominious action which would degrade his whole life. But such

instinct was awanting in Lot. His character though in some respects admirable had none of the generosity of Abram's in it. He had allowed himself on countless previous occasions to take advantage of Abram's unselfishness. Generosity is not always infectious; often it encourages selfishness in child, relative, or neighbour. And so Lot instead of rivalling, traded on his uncle's magnanimity; and chose him all the plains of Jordan because in his eye it was the richest part of the land.

This choice of Sodom as a dwelling-place was the great mistake of Lot's life. He is the type of that very large class of men who have but one rule for determining them at the turning points of life. He was swayed solely by the consideration of worldly advantage. He has nothing deep, nothing high in him. He recognises no duty to Abram, no gratitude, no modesty; he has no perception of spiritual relations, no sense that God should have something to say in the partition of the land. Lot may be acquitted of a good deal which at first sight one is prompted to lay to his charge, but he cannot be acquitted of showing an eagerness to better himself, regardless of all considerations but the promise of wealth afforded by the fertility of the Jordan valley He saw a quick though dangerous road to wealth. There seemed a certainty of success in his earthly calling, a risk only of moral disaster. He shut his eyes to the risk that he might grasp the wealth; and so doing, ruined both himself and his family.

The situation is one which is ceaselessly repeated. To men in business or in the cultivation of literature or art, or in one of the professions, there are presented opportunities of attaining a better position by cultivating the friendship or identifying oneself with the practice of men whose society is not in itself desirable

Society is made up of little circles, each of which has its own monopoly of some social or commercial or political advantage, and its own characteristic tone and enjoyments and customs. And if a man will not join one of these circles and accommodate himself to the mode of carrying on business and to the style of living it has identified with itself, he must forego the advantages which entrance to that circle would secure for him. As clearly as Lot saw that the well-watered plain stretching away under the sunshine was the right place to exercise his vocation as a flock-master, so do we see that associated with such and such persons and recognised as one of them, we shall be able more effectively than in any other position to use whatever natural gifts we have, and win the recognition and the profit these gifts seem to warrant. There is but one drawback. "The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." There is a tone you do not like; you hesitate to identify yourself with men who live solely and with cynical frankness only for gain; whose every sentence betrays the contemptible narrowness of soul to which worldliness condemns men; who live for money and who glory in their shame.

The very nature of the world in which we live makes such temptation universal. And to yield is common and fatal. We persuade ourselves we need not enter into close relations with the persons we propose to have business connections with. Lot would have been horrified, that day he made his choice, had it been told him his daughters would marry men of Sodom. But the swimmer who ventures into the outer circle of the whirlpool finds that his own resolve not to go further presents a very weak resistance to the water's inevitable

suction. We fancy perhaps that to refuse the companionship of any class of men is pharisaic; that we have no business to condemn the attitude towards the Church, or the morality, or the style of living adopted by any class of men among us. This is the mere cant of liberalism. We do not condemn persons who suffer from smallpox, but a smallpox hospital would be about the last place we should choose for a residence. Or possibly we imagine we shall be able to carry some better influences into the society we enter. A vain imagination; the motive for choosing the society has already sapped our power for good.

Many of the errors of worldly men only reveal their most disastrous consequences in the second generation. Like some virulent diseases they have a period of incubation. Lot's family grew up in a very different atmosphere from that which had nourished his own youth in Abram's tents. An adult and robust Englishman can withstand the climate of India; but his children who are born in it cannot. And the position in society which has been gained in middle life by the carefully and hardily trained child of a God-fearing household, may not very visibly damage his own character, but may yet be absolutely fatal to the morality of his children. Lot may have persuaded himself he chose the dangerous prosperity of Sodom mainly for the sake of his children; but in point of fact he had better have seen them die of starvation in the most barren and parched desolation. And the parent who disregards conscience and chooses wealth or position, fancying that thus he benefits his children, will find to his life-long sorrow that he has entangled them in unimagined temptations.

But the man who makes Lot's choice not only does

a great injury to his children, but cuts himself off from all that is best in life. We are safe to say that after leaving Abram's tents Lot never again enjoyed unconstrainedly happy days. The men born and brought up in Sodom were possibly happy after their kind and in their fashion; but Lot was not. His soul was daily vexed. Many a time while hearing the talk of the men his daughters had married, must Lot have gone out with a sore heart, and looked to the distant hills that hid the tents of Abram, and longed for an hour of the company he used to enjoy. And the society to which you are tempted to join yourself may not be unhappy, but you can take no surer means of beclouding, embittering, and ruining your whole life than by joining it. You cannot forget the thoughts you once had, the friendships you once delighted in, the hopes that shed brightness through all your life. You cannot blot out the ideal that once you cherished as the most animating element of your life. Every day there will be that rising in your mind which is in the sharpest contrast to the thoughts of those with whom you are associated. You will despise them for their shallow, worldly ideas and ways; but you will despise yourself still more, being conscious that what they are through ignorance and upbringing, you are in virtue of your own foolish and mean choice. There is that in you which rebels against the superficial and external measure by which they judge things, and yet you have deliberately chosen these as your associates, and can only think with heart-broken regret of the high thoughts that once visited you and the hopes you have now no means of fulfilling. Your life is taken out of your own hands; you find yourself in bondage to the circumstances you have chosen; and

you are learning in bitterness, disappointment, and shame, that indeed "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." To determine your life solely by the prospect of worldly success is to risk the loss of the best things in life. To sacrifice friendship or conscience to success in your calling is to sacrifice what is best to what is lowest, and to blind yourself to the highest human happiness. For happily the essential elements of the highest happiness are as open to the poor as to the rich, to the unsuccessful as to the successful—love of wife and children, congenial and educating friendships, the knowledge of what the best men have done and the wisest men have said; the pleasure and impulse, the sentiments and beliefs which result from our knowledge of the heroic deeds done from year to year among men; the enlivening influence of examples that tell on all men alike, young and old, rich and poor; the insight and strength of character that are won in the hard wrestle with life; the growing consciousness that God is in human life, that He is ours and that we are His—these things and all that makes human life of value are universal as air and sunshine, but must be missed by those who make the world their object.

Though in point of fact Lot cut himself off by his choice from direct participation in the special inheritance to which Abram was called by God, it might perhaps be too much to say that his choice of the valley of Jordan was an explicit renunciation of the special blessedness of those who find their joy in responding to God's call and doing His work in the world. It might also be extravagant to say that his choice of the richest land was prompted by the feeling that he was not included in the promise to Abram, and

might as well make the most of his present opportunities. But it is certain that Abram's generosity to Lot arose out of his sense that in God he himself had abundant possession. In Egypt he had learned that in order to secure all that is worth having a man need never resort to duplicity, trickery, bold lying. He now learns that in order to enter on his own God-provided lot, he need shut no other man out of his. He is taught that to acknowledge amply the rights of other men is the surest road to the enjoyment of his own rights. He is taught that there is room in God's plan for every man to follow his most generous impulses and the highest views of life that visit him.

It was Abram's simple belief that God s promise was meant and was substantial, that made him indifferent as to what Lot might choose. His faith was judged in this scene, and was proved to be sound. This man whose very calling it was to own this land, could freely allow Lot to choose the best of it. Why? Because he has learned that it is not by any plan of his own he is to come into possession; that God Who promised is to give him the land in His own way, and that his part is to act uprightly, mercifully, like God. Wherever there is faith, the same results will appear. He who believes that God is pledged to provide for him cannot be greedy, anxious, covetous; can only be liberal, even magnanimous. Any one can thus test his own faith. If he does not find that what God promises weighs substantially when put in the scales with gold; if he does not find that the accomplishment of God's purpose with him in the world is to him the most valuable thing, and actually compels him to think lightly of worldly position and ordinary success; if he does not find that in point of fact the gains which content a man

of the world shrivel and lose interest, he may feel tolerably certain he has no faith and is not counting as certain what God has promised.

It is commonly observed that wealth pursues the men who part with it most freely. Abram had this experience. No sooner had he allowed Lot to choose his portion than God gave him assurance that the whole would be his. It is "the meek" who "inherit the earth." Not only have they, in their very losses and while suffering wrong at the hands of their fellows, a purer joy than those who wrong them; but they know themselves heirs of God with the certainty of enjoying all His possessions that can avail for their advantage. Declining to devote themselves as living sacrifices to business they hold their soul at leisure for what brings truest happiness, for friendship, for knowledge, for charity. Even in this life they may be said to inherit the earth, for all its richest fruits are theirs —the ground may belong to other men, but the beauty of the landscape is theirs without burden—and ever and anon they hear such words as were now uttered to Abram. They alone are inclined or able to receive renewed assurances that God is mindful of His promise and will abundantly bless them. It is they who are in no haste to be rich, and are content to abide in the retired hill-country where they can freely assemble round God's altar, it is they who seek first the kingdom of God and make sure of that, whatever else they put in hazard, to whom God's encouragements come. You wonder at the certainty with which others speak of hearing God's voice and that so seldom you have the joy of knowing that God is directing and encouraging you. Why should you wonder, if you very well know that your attention is directed mainly to the

world, that your heart trembles and thrills with all the fluctuations of your earthly hopes, that you wait for news and listen to every hint that can affect your position in life? Can you wonder that an ear trained to be so sensitive to the near earthly sounds, should quite have lost the range of heavenly voices?

Of the assurance here given him Abram was probably much in need when Lot had withdrawn with his flocks and servants. When the warmth of feeling cooled and allowed the somewhat unpleasant facts of the case to press upon his mind; and when he heard his shepherds murmuring that after all the strife they had maintained for their master's rights, he should have weakly yielded these to Lot; and when he reflected, as now he inevitably would reflect, how selfish and ungrateful Lot had shown himself to be, he must have been tempted to think he had possibly made a mistake in dealing so generously with such a man. This reflection on himself might naturally grow into a reflection upon God, Who might have been expected so to order matters as to give the best country to the best man. All such reflections are precluded by the renewed grant he now receives of the whole land.

It is always as difficult to govern our heart wisely after as before making a sacrifice. It is as difficult to keep the will decided as to make the original decision; and it is more difficult to think affectionately of those for whom the sacrifice has been made, when the change in their condition and our own is actually accomplished. There is a natural reaction after a generous action which is not always sufficiently resisted. And when we see that those who refuse to make any sacrifices are more prosperous and less ruffled in spirit than ourselves we are tempted to take

matters into our own hand, and, without waiting upon God, to use the world's quick ways. At such times we find how difficult it is to hold an advanced position, and how much unbelief mingles with the sincerest faith, and what vile dregs of selfishness sully the clearest generosity; we find our need of God and of those encouragements and assistances He can impart to the soul. Happy are we if we receive them and are enabled thereby to be constant in the good we have begun; for all sacrifice is good begun. And as Abram saw, when the cities of the plain were destroyed, how kindly God had guided him; so when our history is complete, we shall have no inclination to grumble at any passage of our life which we entered by generosity and faith in God, but shall see how tenderly God has held us back from much that our soul has been ardently desiring, and which we thought would be the making of us.

X.

ABRAM'S RESCUE OF LOT.

GENESIS xiv.

THIS chapter evidently incorporates a contemporary account of the events recorded. So antique a document was it even when it found its place in this book, that the editor had to modernize some of its expressions that it might be intelligible. The places mentioned were no longer known by the names here preserved—Bela, the vale of Siddim, En-mishpat, the valley of Shaveh, all these names were unknown even to the persons who dwelt in the places once so designated. It can scarcely have been Abram who wrote down the narrative, for he himself is spoken of as Abram the Hebrew, the man born beyond the Euphrates, which is a way of speaking of himself no one would naturally adopt. From the clear outline given of the route followed by the expedition of Chedorlaomer, it might be supposed that some old staff-secretary had reported on the campaign. However that may be, the discoveries of the last two or three years have shed light on the outlandish names that have stood for four thousand years in this document, and on the relations subsisting between Elam and Palestine.

On the bricks now preserved in our own British Museum the very names we read in this chapter can

be traced, in the slightly altered form which is always given to a name when pronounced by different races. Chedorlaomer is the Hebrew transliteration of Kudur Lagamar; Lagamar was the name of one of the Chaldean deities, and the whole name means Lagamar's son, evidently a name of dignity adopted by the king of Elam. Elam comprehended the broad and rich plains to the east of the lower course of the Tigris, together with the mountain range (8,000 to 10,000 feet high) that bounds them. Elam was always able to maintain its own against Assyria and Babylonia, and at this time it evidently exercised some kind of supremacy not only over these neighbouring powers, but as far west as the valley of the Jordan. The importance of keeping open the valley of the Jordan is obvious to every one who has interest enough in the subject to look at a map. That valley was the main route for trading caravans and for military expeditions between the Euphrates and Egypt. Whoever held that valley might prove a most formidable annoyance and indeed an absolute interruption to commercial or political relations between Egypt and Elam, or the Eastern powers. Sometimes it might serve the purpose of East and West to have a neutral power between them, as became afterwards clear in the history of Israel, but oftener it was the ambition of either Egypt or of the East to hold Canaan in subjection. A rebellion therefore of these chiefs occupying the vale of Siddim was sufficiently important to bring the king of Elam from his distant capital, attaching to his army as he came, his tributaries Amraphel king of Shinar or northern Chaldea, Arioch king of a district on the east of the Euphrates, and finally Tidal, or rather Tur-gal *i.e.* the great chief, who ruled over the nations or tribes to the north of Babylonia.

Susa, the capital of Elam, lies almost on the same parallel as the vale of Siddim, but between them lie many hundred miles of impracticable desert. Chedorlaomer and his army followed therefore much the same route as Terah in his emigration, first going north-west up the Euphrates and then crossing it probably at Carchemish, or above it, and coming southward towards Canaan. But the country to the east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea was occupied by warlike and marauding tribes who would have liked nothing better than to swoop down on a rich booty-laden Eastern army. With the sagacity of an old soldier therefore, Chedorlaomer makes it his first business to sweep this rough ground, and so cripple the tribes in his passage southwards, that when he swept round the lower end of the Dead Sea and up the Jordan valley he should have nothing to fear at least on his right flank. The tribe that first felt his sword was that of the Rephaim, or giants. Their stronghold was Ashteroth Karnaim, or Ashteroth of the two horns, a town dedicated to the goddess Astarte whose symbol was the crescent or two-horned moon. The Zuzims and the Emims, "a people great and many and tall," as we read in Deuteronomy, next fell before the invading host. The Horites, *i.e.* cave-dwellers or troglodytes, would scarcely hold Chedorlaomer long, though from their hilly fastnesses they might do him some damage. Passing through their mountains he came upon the great road between the Dead Sea and the Elanitic gulf—but he crossed this road and still held westward till he reached the edge of what is roughly known as the Desert of Sinai. Here, says the narrative (ver. 7), they returned, that is, this was their furthest point south and west, and here they turned and made for the vale of Siddim, smiting the Amalekites and the Amorites on their route.

This is the only part of the army's route that is at all obscure. The last place they are spoken of as touching before reaching the vale of Siddim is Hazezon-Tamar, or as it was afterwards and is still called Engedi. Now Engedi lies on the western shore of the Dead Sea about half way up from south to north. It lies on a very steep, indeed artificially made, pass and is a place of much greater importance on that account than its size would make it. The road between Moab and Palestine runs by the western margin of the Dead Sea up to this point, but beyond this point the shore is impracticable, and the only road is through the Engedi pass on to the higher ground above. If the army chose this route then they were compelled to force this pass; if on the other hand they preferred during their whole march from Kadesh to keep away west of the Dead Sea on the higher ground, then they would only detail a company to pounce upon Engedi, as the main army passed behind and above. In either case the main body must have been if not actually within sight of, yet only a few miles from, the encampment of Abram.

At length as they dropped down through the practicable passes into the vale of Siddim their grand object became apparent, and the kings of the five allied towns, probably warned by the hill-tribes weeks before, drew out to meet them. But it is not easy to check an army in full career, and the wells of bitumen, which those who knew the ground might have turned to good purpose against the foreigners, actually hindered the home troops and became a trap to them. The rout was complete. No second stand or rally was attempted. The towns were sacked, the fields swept, and so swift were the movements of the invaders that

although Abram was barely twenty miles off, and no doubt started for the rescue of Lot the hour he got the news, he did not overtake the army, laden as it was with spoil and retarded by prisoners and wounded, until they had reached the sources of Jordan.

But well-conceived and brilliantly executed as this campaign had been, the experienced warrior had failed to take account of the most formidable opponent he would have to reckon with. Those that escaped from the slaughter at Sodom took to the hills, and either knowing they would find shelter with Abram or more probably blindly running on, found themselves at nightfall within sight of the encampment at Hebron. There is no delay on Abram's part; he hastily calls out his men, each snatching his bow, his sword, and his spear, and slinging over his shoulders a few days' provision. The neighbouring Amorite chiefs Aner, Mamre and Eshcol join them, probably with a troop each, and before many hours are lost they are down the passes and in hot pursuit. Not however till they had traversed a hundred and twenty miles or more do they overtake the Eastern army. But at Dan, at the very springs of the Jordan, they find them, and making a night attack throw them into utter confusion and pursue them as far as Hobah, a village near Damascus, that retains to this day the same name.

One is naturally curious to see how Abram will conduct himself in circumstances so unaccustomed. From leading a quiet pastoral life he suddenly becomes the most important man in the country, a man who can make himself felt from the Nile to the Tigris. From a herd he becomes a hero. But, notoriously, power tries a man, and, as one has often seen persons make very glaring mistakes in such altered circum-

stances and alter their characters and beliefs to suit and take advantage of the new material and opportunities presented to them, we are interested in seeing how a man whose one rule of action has hitherto been faith in a promise given him by God, will pass through such a trial. Can a spiritual quality like faith be of much service in rough campaigning and when the man of faith is mixed up with persons of doubtful character and unscrupulous conduct, and brought into contact with considerable political powers? Can we trace to Abram's faith any part of his action at this time? No sooner is the question put than we see that his faith in God's promise was precisely that which gave him balance and dignity, courage and generosity in dealing with the three prominent persons in the narrative. He could afford to be forgiving and generous to his grand competitor Lot, precisely because he felt sure God would deal generously with himself. He could afford to acknowledge Melchisedek and any other authority that might appear, as his superior, and he would not take advantage, even when at the head of his men eager for more fighting, of the peaceful king who came out to propitiate him, because he knew that God would give him his land without wronging other people. And he scorned the wages of the king of Sodom, holding himself to be no mercenary captain, nor indebted to any one but God. In a word, you see faith producing all that is of importance in his conduct at this time.

Lot is the person who of all others might have been expected to be forward in his expressions of gratitude to Abram—not a word of his is recorded. Ashamed he cannot but have been, for if Abram said not a word of reproach, there would be plenty of Lot's old friends among Abram's men who could not lose so good an

opportunity of twitting him about the good choice he had made. And considering how humiliating it would have been for him to go back with Abram and abandon the district of his adoption, we can scarcely wonder that he should have gone quietly back to Sodom, well as he must by this time have known the nature of the risks he ran there. For, after all, this warning was not very loud. The same thing, or a similar thing, might have happened had he remained with Abram. The warning was unobtrusive as the warnings in life mostly are; audible to the ear that has been accustomed to listen to the still small voice of conscience, inaudible to the ear that is trained to hear quite other voices. God does not set angels and flaming swords in every man's path. The little whisper that no one hears but ourselves only and that says quite quietly that we are continuing in a wrong course, is as certain an indication that we are in danger, as if God were to proclaim our case from heaven with thunder or the voice of an archangel. And when a man has persistently refused to listen to conscience it ceases to speak, and he loses the power to discern between good and evil and is left wholly without a guide. He may be running straight to destruction and he does not know it. You cannot live under two principles of action, regard to worldly interest and regard to conscience. You can train yourself to great acuteness in perceiving and following out what is for your worldly advantage, or you can train yourself to great acuteness of conscience; but you must make your choice, for in proportion as you gain sensitiveness in the one direction you lose it in the other. If your eye is *single* your whole body is full of light; but if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

Melchizedek is generally recognised as the most mysterious and unaccountable of historical personages; appearing here in the King's Vale no one knows whence, and disappearing no one knows whither, but coming with his hands full of substantial gifts for the wearied household of Abram, and the captive women that were with him. Of each of the patriarchs we can tell the paternity; the date of his birth, and the date of his death; but this man stands with none to claim him, he forms no part of any series of links by which the oldest and the present times are connected. Though possessed of the knowledge of the Most High God, his name is not found in any of those genealogies which show us how that knowledge passed from father to son. Of all the other great men whose history is recorded a careful genealogy is given; but here the writer breaks his rule, and breaks it where, had there not been substantial reason, he would most certainly have adhered to it. For here is the greatest man of the time, a man before whom Abram the father of the faithful, the honoured of all nations, bowed and paid tithes; and yet he appears and passes away likest to a vision of the night. Perhaps even in his own time there was none that could point to the chamber where first he was cradled, nor show the tent round which first he played in his boyhood, nor hoard up a single relic of the early years of the man that had risen to be the first man upon earth in those days. So that the Apostle speaks of him as a very type of all that is mysterious and abrupt in appearance and disappearance, "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life," and as he significantly adds, "made like unto the Son of God." For as Melchizedek stands thus on the page of history, so our Lord in

reality—as the one has no recorded pedigree, and holds an office beginning and ending in his own person, so our Lord, though born of a woman, stands separate from sinners and quite out of the ordinary line of generations, and exercises an office which he received hereditarily from none, and which he could commit to no successor. As the one stands apparently disconnected from all before and after him, so the Other in point of fact did thus suddenly emerge from eternity, a problem to all who saw Him; owning the authority of earthly parents, yet claiming an antiquity greater than Abram's; appearing suddenly to the captivity led captive, with His hands full of gifts, and His lips dropping words of blessing.

Melchizedek is the one personage on earth whom Abram recognises as his spiritual superior. Abram accepts his blessing and pays him tithes; apparently as priest of the Most High God; so that in paying to him, Abram is giving the tenth of his spoils to God. This is not any mere courtesy of private persons. It was done in presence of various parties of jealously watchful retainers. Men of rank and office and position *consider* how they should act to one another and who should take precedence. And Abram did deliberately and with a perfect perception of what he was doing, whatever he now did. Manifestly therefore God's revelation of Himself was not as yet confined to the one line running from Abram to Christ. Here was a man of whom we really do not know whether he was a Canaanite, a son of Ham or a son of Shem; yet Abram recognises him as having knowledge of the true God, and even bows to him as his spiritual superior in office if not in experience. This shows us how little jealousy Abram had of others being favoured by God, how little he thought

his connection with God would be less secure if other men enjoyed a similar connection, and how heartily he welcomed those who with different rites and different prospects yet worshipped the living God. It shows us also how apt we are to limit God's ways of working; and how little we understand of the connections He has with those who are not situated as we ourselves are. Here while all our attention is concentrated on Abram as carrying the whole spiritual hope of the world, there emerges from an obscure Canaanite valley a man nearer to God than Abram is. From how many unthought-of places such men may at any time come out upon us, we really can never tell.

Again Melchizedek is evidently a title, not a name—the word means King of Righteousness, or Righteous King. It may have been a title adopted by a line of kings, or it may have been peculiar to this one man. But these old Canaanites, if Canaanites they were, had got hold of a great principle when they gave this title to the king of their city of Salem or Peace. They perceived that it was the righteousness, the justice, of their king that could best uphold their peaceful city. They saw that the right king for them was a man not grinding his neighbours by war and taxes, not overriding the rights of others and seeking always enlargement of his own dominion; nor a merely merciful man, inclined to treat sin lightly and leaning always to laxity; but the man they would choose to give them peace was the righteous man who might sometimes seem overscrupulous, sometimes over-stern, who would sometimes be called romantic and sometimes fanatical, but through all whose dealings it would be obvious that justice to all parties was the aim in view. Some of them might not be good enough to love a ruler who

made no more of their special interest than he did of others, but all would possibly have wit enough to see that only by justice could they have peace. It is the reflex of God's government in which righteousness is the foundation of peace, a righteousness unflinching and invariable, promulgating holy laws and exacting punishment from all who break them. It is this that gives us hope of eternal peace, that we know God has not left out of account facts that must yet be reckoned with, nor merely lulled the unquiet forebodings of conscience, but has let every righteous law and principle find full scope, has done righteously in offering us pardon so that nothing can ever turn up to deprive us of our peace. And it is quite in vain that any individual holds before his mind the prospect of peace, *i.e.* of permanent satisfaction, so long as he is not seeking it by righteousness. In so far as he is keeping his conscience from interfering, in so far is he making it impossible to himself to enter into the condition for the sake of which he is keeping conscience from regulating his conduct.

Lastly, Abram's refusal of the king of Sodom's offers is significant. Naturally enough, and probably in accordance with well-established usage, the king proposes that Abram should receive the rescued goods and the spoil of the invading army. But Abram knew men, and knew that although now Sodom was eager to show that he felt himself indebted to Abram, the time would come when he would point to this occasion as laying the foundation of Abram's fortune. When a man rises in the world every one will tell you of the share he had in raising him, and will convey the impression that but for assistance rendered by the speaker he would not have been what he now is. Abram knows that he

is destined to rise, and knows also by Whose help he is to rise. He intends to receive all from God; and therefore not a thread from Sodom. He puts his refusal in the form adopted by the man whose mind is made up beyond revisal. He has "vowed" it. He had anticipated such offers and had considered their bearing on his relations to God and man; and taking advantage of the unembarrassed season in which the offer was as yet only a possibility, he had resolved that when it was actually made he would refuse it, no matter what advantages it seemed to offer. So should we in our better seasons and when we know we are viewing things healthily, conscientiously, and righteously, determine what our conduct is to be, and if possible so commit ourselves to it that when the right frame is passed we cannot draw back from the right conduct. Abram had done so, and however tempting the spoils of the Eastern kings were, they did not move him. His vow had been made to the Possessor of heaven and earth, in Whose hand were riches beyond the gifts of Sodom.

Here again it is the man of faith that appears. He shows a noble jealousy of God's prerogative to bless him. He will not give men occasion to say that any earthly monarch has enriched him. It shall be made plain that it is on God he is depending. In all men of faith there will be something of this spirit. They cannot fail so to frame their life as to let it come clearly out that for happiness, for success, for comfort, for joy, they are in the main depending on God. That this cannot be done in the complex life of modern society, no one will venture to say in presence of this incident. Could we more easily have shown our reliance upon God in the hurry of a sudden foray, in the turmoil and

intense action of a midnight attack and hand to hand conflict, in the excitement and elation of a triumphal progress, the kings of the country vying with one another to do us honour and the rescued captives lauding our valour and generosity? No one fails to see what it was that balanced Abram in this intoxicating march. No one asks what enabled him, while leading his armed followers flushed with success through a land weakened by recent dismay and disaster, to restrain them and himself from claiming the whole land as his. No one asks what gave him moral perception to see that the opportunity given him of winning the land by the sword was a temptation not a guiding providence. To every reader it is obvious that his dependence on God was his safeguard and his light. God would bring him by fair and honourable means to his own. There was no need of violence, no need of receiving help from doubtful allies. This is true nobility; and this, faith always produces. But it must be a faith like Abram's; not a quick and superficial growth, but a deeply-rooted principle. For against all temptations this only is our sure defence, that already our hearts are so filled with God's promise that other offers find no craving in us, no empty dissatisfied spot on which they can settle. To such faith God responds by the elevating and strengthening assurance, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

XI.

COVENANT WITH ABRAM.

GENESIS XV.

OF the nine Divine manifestations made during Abram's life this is the fifth. At Ur, at Kharran, at the oak of Moreh, at the encampment between Bethel and Ai, and now at Mamre, he received guidance and encouragement from God. Different terms are used regarding these manifestations. Sometimes it is said "The Lord appeared unto him;" here for the first time in the course of God's revelation occurs that expression which afterwards became normal, "The word of the Lord came unto Abram." Throughout the subsequent history this word of the Lord continues to come, often at long intervals, but always meeting the occasion and needs of His people and joining itself on to what had already been declared, until at last the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, giving thus to all men assurance of the nearness and profound sympathy of their God. To repeat this revelation is impossible. A repetition of it would be a denial of its reality. For a second life on earth is allowed to no man; and were our Lord to live a second human life it were proof He was no true man, but an anomalous, unaccountable, uninstructive, appearance or simulacrum of a man.

But though these revelations of God are finished,

though complete knowledge of God is given in Christ, God comes to the individual still through the Spirit Whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them to us. And in doing so the law is observed which we see illustrated here. God comes to a man with further encouragement and light for a new step when he has conscientiously used the light he already has. The temper that "seeks for a sign" and expects that some astounding Providence should be sent to make us religious is by no means obsolete. Many seem to expect that before they act on the knowledge they have, they will receive more. They put off giving themselves to the service of God under some kind of impression that some striking event or much more distinct knowledge is required to give them a decided turn to a religious life. In so doing they invert God's order. It is when we have conscientiously followed such light as we have, and faithfully done all that we know to be right, that God gives us further light. It was immediately on the back of faithful action that Abram received new help to his faith.

The time was seasonable for other reasons. Never did Abram feel more in need of such assurance. He had been successful in his midnight attack and had scattered the force from beyond Euphrates, but he knew the temper of these Eastern monarchs well enough to be aware that there was nothing they hailed with greater pleasure than a pretext for extending their conquests and adding to their territory. To Abram it must have appeared certain that the next campaigning season would see his country invaded and his little encampment swept away by the Eastern host. Most appropriate, therefore, are the words: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield."

But another train of thoughts occupied Abram's mind perhaps even more unceasingly at this time. After busy engagement comes dulness; after triumph, flatness and sadness. I have pursued kings, got myself a great name, led captivity captive. Men are speaking of me in Sodom, and finding that in me they have a useful and important ally. But what is all this to my purpose? Am I any nearer my inheritance? I have got all that men might think I needed; they may be unable to understand why now, of all times, I should seem heartless; but, O Lord, Thou knowest how empty these things seem to me, and what wilt Thou give me? Abram could not understand why he was kept so long waiting. The child given when he was a hundred years old might equally have been given twenty-five years before, when he first came to the land of Canaan. All Abram's servants had their children, there was no lack of young men born in his encampment. He could not leave his tent without hearing the shouts of other men's children, and having them cling to his garments—but "to me Thou hast given no seed; and lo! one born in mine house, a slave, is mine heir."

Thus it often is that while a man is receiving much of what is generally valued in the world, the one thing he himself most prizes is beyond his reach. He has his hope irremovably fixed on something which he feels would complete his life and make him a thoroughly happy man; there is one thing which, above all else, would be a right and helpful blessing to him. He speaks of it to God. For years it has framed a petition for itself when no other desire could make itself heard. Back and back to this his heart comes, unable to find rest in anything so long as this is withheld. He

cannot help feeling that it is God who is keeping it from him. He is tempted to say, "What is the use of all else to me, why give me things Thou knowest I care little for, and reserve the one thing on which my happiness depends?" As Abram might have said; "Why make me a great name in the land, when there is no one to keep it alive in men's memories; why increase my possessions when there is none to inherit but a stranger?"

Is there then any resulting benefit to character in this so common experience of delayed expectations? In Abram's case there certainly was. It was in these years he was drawn close enough to God to hear Him say, "*I* am thy exceeding great reward." He learned in the multitude of his debatings about God's promise and the delay of its fulfilment, that God was more than all His gifts. He had started as a mere hopeful colonist and founder of a family; these twenty-five years of disappointment made him the friend of God and the Father of the Faithful. Slowly do we also pass from delight in God's gifts to delight in Himself, and often by a similar experience. From what have you received truest and deepest pleasure in life? Is it not from your friendships? Not from what your friends have given you or done for you; rather from what you have done for them; but chiefly from your affectionate intercourse. You, being persons, must find your truest joy in persons, in personal love, personal goodness and wisdom. But friendship has its crown in the friendship of God. The man who knows God as his friend and is more certain of God's goodness and wisdom and steadfastness than he can be of the worth of the man he has loved and trusted and delighted in from his boyhood, the man who is always accompanied by a latent

sense of God's observation and love, is truly living in the peace of God that passeth understanding. This raises him above the touch of worldly losses and restores him in all distresses, even to the surprise of observers; his language is, "There may be many that will say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. *Thou* hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."

But evidently there was still another feeling in Abram's heart at this particular point in his career. He could not bear to think he was to miss that very thing which God had promised him. The keen yearning for an heir which God's promise had stirred in him was not lost sight of in the great saying, "*I* am thy exceeding great reward." When he was journeying back to his encampment not a shoestring richer than he left, and while he heard his men, disappointed of booty, murmuring that he should be so scrupulous, he cannot but have felt some soreness that he should be set before his little world as a man who had the enjoyment neither of this world's rewards nor of God. And here must have come the strong temptation that comes to every man: Might it not be as well to take what he could get, to enjoy what was put fairly within his reach, instead of waiting for what seemed so uncertain as God's gift? It is painful to be exposed to the observation of others or to our own observation, as persons who, on the one hand, refuse to seek happiness in the world's way, and yet are not finding it in God. You have possibly with some magnanimity rejected a tempting offer because there were conditions attached to which conscience could not reconcile itself; but you find that you are in consequence suffering greater

privations than you expected and that no providential intervention seems to be made to reward your conscientiousness. Or you suddenly become aware that though you have for years refused to be mirthful or influential or successful or comfortable in the world's way and on the world's terms, you are yet getting no substitute for what you refuse. You will not join the world's mirth, but then you are morose and have no joy of any kind. You will not use means you disapprove of for influencing men, but neither have you the influence of a strong Christian character. In fact by giving up the world you seem to have contracted and weakened instead of enlarging and deepening your life.

In such a condition we can but imitate Abram and cast ourselves more resolutely on God. If you find it most weary and painful to deny yourself in these special ways which have fallen to be your experience, you can but utter your complaint to God, assured that in Him you will find consideration. He knows why He has called you, why He has given you strength to abandon worldly hopes; He appreciates your adherence to Him and He will renew your faith and hope. If day by day you are saying, "Lead Thou me on," if you say, "What wilt Thou give me?" not in complaint but in lively expectation, encouragement enough will be yours.

The means by which Abram's faith was renewed were appropriate. He has been seeing in the tumult and violence and disappointment of the world much to suggest the thought that God's promise could never work itself out in the face of the rude realities around him. So God leads him out and points him to the stars, each one called by his name, and thus reminds the Chaldæan

who had so often gazed at and studied them in their silent steady courses, that his God has designs of infinite sweep and comprehension; that throughout all space His worlds obey His will and all harmoniously play their part in the execution of His vast design; that we and all our affairs are in a strong hand, but moving in orbits so immense that small portions of them do not show us their direction and may seem to be out of course. Abram is led out alone with the mighty God, and to every saved soul there comes such a crisis when before God's majesty we stand awed and humbled, all complaints hushed, and indeed our personal interests disappear or become so merged in God's purposes that we think only of Him; our mistakes and wrong-doing are seen now not so much as bringing misery upon ourselves as interrupting and perverting His purposes, and His word comes home to our hearts as stable and satisfying.

It was in this condition that Abram believed God, and He counted it to him for righteousness. Probably if we read this without Paul's commentary on it in the fourth of Romans, we should suppose it meant no more than that Abram's faith, exercised as it was in trying circumstances, met with God's cordial approval. The faith or belief here spoken of was a resolute renewal of the feeling which had brought him out of Chaldæa. He put himself fairly and finally into God's hand to be blessed in God's way and in God's time, and this act of resignation, this resolve that he would not force his own way in the world but would wait upon God, was looked upon by God as deserving the name of righteousness, just as much as honesty and integrity in his conduct with Lot or with his servants. Paul begs us to notice that an act of faith accepting God's favour is

a very different thing from a work done for the sake of winning God's favour. God's favour is always a matter of grace, it is favour conferred on the undeserving; it is never a matter of debt, it is never favour conferred because it has been won. To put this beyond doubt he appeals to this righteousness of Abram's. How, he asks, did Abram achieve righteousness? Not by observing ordinances and commandments; for there were none to observe; but by trusting God, by believing that already without any working or winning of his, God loved him and designed blessedness for him, in short by referring his prospect of happiness and usefulness wholly to God and not at all to himself. This is the essential quality of the godly; and having this, Abram had that root which produced all actual righteousness and likeness to God.

It is sufficiently obvious in such a life as Abram's why faith is the one thing needful. Faith is required because it is only when a man believes God's promise and rests in His love that he can co-operate with God in severing himself from iniquitous prospects and in so living for spiritual ends as to enter the life and the blessedness God calls him to. The boy who does not believe his father, when he comes to him in the midst of his play and tells him he has something for him which will please him still better, suffers the penalty of unbelief by losing what his father would have given him. All missing of true enjoyment and blessedness results from unbelief in God's promise. Men do not walk in God's ways because they do not believe in God's ends. They do not believe that spiritual ends are as substantial and desirable as those that are physical.

Abram's faith is easily recognised, because not only had he not wrought for the blessing God promised him,

but it was impossible for him even to see how it could be achieved. That which God promised was apparently quite beyond the reach of human power. It serves then as an admirable illustration of the essence of faith; and Paul uses it as such. It is not because faith is the root of all actual righteousness that Paul describes it as "imputed for righteousness." It is because faith at once gives a man possession of what no amount of working could ever achieve. God now offers in Christ righteousness, that is to say, justification, the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God with all the fruits of this acceptance, the indwelling Divine Spirit and life everlasting. He offers this freely as he offered to Abram what Abram could never have won for himself. And all that we are asked to do is to accept it. This is all we are asked to do in order to our becoming the forgiven and accepted children of God. After becoming so, there of course remains an infinite amount of service to be rendered, of work to be done, of self-discipline to be undergone. But in answer to the awakened sinner's enquiry, "What must I do to be saved," Paul replies, "You are to *do* nothing; nothing you can do can win God's favour, because that favour is already yours; nothing you can do can achieve the rectification of your present condition, but Christ has achieved it. Believe that God is with you and that Christ can deliver you and commit yourself cordially to the life you are called to, hopeful that what is promised will be fulfilled."

Abram's faith cordial as it was, yet was not independent of some sensible sign to maintain it. The sign given was twofold: the smoking furnace and a prediction of the sojourn of Abram's posterity in Egypt. The symbols were similar to those by which on other

occasions the presence of God was represented. Fire, cleansing, consuming, and unapproachable, seemed to be the natural emblem of God's holiness. In the present instance it was especially suitable, because the manifestation was made after sundown and when no other could have been seen. The cutting up of the carcases and passing between the pieces was one of the customary forms of contract. It was one of the many devices men have fallen upon to make sure of one another's word. That God should condescend to adopt these modes of pledging Himself to men is significant testimony to His love; a love so resolved on accomplishing the good of men that it resents no slowness of faith and accommodates itself to unworthy suspicions. It makes itself as obvious and pledges itself with as strong guarantees to men as if it were the love of a mortal whose feelings might change and who had not clearly foreseen all consequences and issues.

The prediction of the long sojourn of Abram's posterity in Egypt was not only helpful to those who had to endure the Egyptian bondage, but also to Abram himself. He no doubt felt the temptation, from which at no time the Church has been free, to consider himself the favourite of heaven before whose interests all other interests must bow. He is here taught that other men's rights must be respected as well as his, and that not one hour before absolute justice requires it, shall the land of the Amorites be given to his posterity. And that man is considerably past the rudimentary knowledge of God who understands that every act of God springs from justice and not from caprice, and that no creature upon earth is sooner or later unjustly dealt with, by the Supreme Ruler. In the life of Abram it becomes visible, how, by living with God

and watching for every expression of His will, a man's knowledge of the Divine nature enlarges; and it is also interesting to observe that shortly after this he grounds all his pleading for Sodom on the truth he had learned here: "Shall not the Judge of *all the earth* do right?"

The announcement that a long interval must elapse before the promise was fulfilled must no doubt have been a shock to Abram; and yet it was sobering and educative. It is a great step we take when we come clearly to understand that God has a great deal to do with us before we can fully inherit the promise. For God's promise, so far from making everything in the future easy and bright, is that which above all else discloses how stern a reality life is; how severe and thorough that discipline must be which makes us capable of achieving God's purposes with us. A horror of great darkness may well fall upon the man who enters into covenant with God, who binds himself to that Being whom no pain nor sacrifice can turn aside from the pursuance of aims once approved. When we look forward and consider the losses, the privations, the self-denials, the delays, the pains, the keen and real discipline, the lowliness of the life to which fellowship with God leads men, darkness and gloom and smoke darken our prospect and discourage us; but the smoke is that which arises from a purifying fire that purges away all that prevents us from living spiritually, a darkness very different from that which settles over the life which amidst much present brightness carries in it the consciousness that its course is downwards, that the blows it suffers are deadening, that its sun is steadily nearing its setting and that everlasting night awaits it.

But over all other feelings this solemn transacting

with God must have produced in Abram a humble ecstasy of confidence. The wonderful mercy and kindness of God in thus binding Himself to a weak and sinful man cannot but have given him new thoughts of God and new thoughts of himself. With fresh elevation of mind and superiority to ordinary difficulties and temptations would he return to his tent that night. In how different a perspective would all things stand to him now that the Infinite God had come so near to him. Things which yesterday fretted or terrified him seemed now remote: matters which had occupied his thought he did not now notice or remember. He was now the Friend of God, taken up into a new world of thoughts and hopes; hiding in his heart the treasure of God's covenant, brooding over the infinite significance and hopefulness of his position as God's ally.

For indeed this was a most extraordinary and a most encouraging event. The Infinite God drew near to Abram and made a contract with him. God as it were said to him, I wish you to count upon Me, to make sure of Me: I therefore pledge Myself by these accustomed forms to be your Friend.

But it was not as an isolated person, nor for his own private interests alone that Abram was thus dealt with by God. It was as a medium of universal blessing that he was taken into covenant with God. The kindness of God which he experienced was merely an intimation of the kindness all men would experience. The laying aside of unapproachable dignity and entrance into covenant with a man was the proclamation of His readiness to be helpful to all and to bring Himself within reach of all. That you may have a God at hand He thus brought Himself down to men and human ways, that your life may not be vain and useless, dark

and misguided, and that you may find that you have a part in a well-ordered universe in which a holy God cares for all and makes His strength and wisdom available for all. Do not allow these intimations of His mercy to go for nothing but use them as intended for your guidance and encouragement.

XII.

BIRTH OF ISHMAEL.

GENESIS xvi.

IN this unpretending chapter we have laid bare to us the origin of one of the most striking facts in the history of religion: namely, that from the one person of Abram have sprung Christianity and that religion which has been and still is its most formidable rival and enemy, Mohammedanism. To Ishmael, the son of Abram, the Arab tribes are proud to trace their pedigree. Through him they claim Abram as their father, and affirm that they are his truest representatives, the sons of his first-born. In Mohammed, the Arabian, they see the fulfilment of the blessing of Abram, and they have succeeded in persuading a large part of the world to believe along with them. Little did Sarah think when she persuaded Abram to take Hagar that she was originating a rivalry which has run with keenest animosity through all ages and which oceans of blood have not quenched. The domestic rivalry and petty womanish spites and resentments so candidly depicted in this chapter, have actually thrown on the world from that day to this one of its darkest and least hopeful shadows. The blood of our own countrymen, it may be of our own kindred, will yet flow in this unappeasable quarrel. So great a matter does a little

fire kindle. So lasting and disastrous are the issues of even slight divergences from pure simplicity.

It is instructive to observe how long this matter of obtaining an heir for Abram occupies the stage of sacred history and in how many aspects it is shown. The stage is rapidly cleared of whatever else might naturally have invited attention, and interest is concentrated on the heir that is to be. The risks run by the appointed mother, the doubts of the father, the surrender now of the mother's rights,—all this is trivial if it concerned only one household, important only when you view it as significant for the race. It was thus men were taught thoughtfully to brood upon the future and to believe that, though Divine, blessing and salvation would spring from earth: man was to co-operate with God, to recognise himself as capable of uniting with God in the highest of all purposes. At the same time, this long and continually deferred expectation of Abram was the simple means adopted by God to convince men once for all that the promised seed is not of nature but of grace, that it is God who sends all effectual and determining blessing, and that we must learn to adapt ourselves to His ways and wait upon Him.

The first man, then, whose religious experience and growth are recorded for us at any length, has this one thing to learn, to trust God's word and wait for it. In this everything is included. But gradually it appears to us all that this is the great difficulty, to wait; to let God take His own time to bless us. It is hard to believe in God's perfect love and care when we are receiving no present comfort or peace; hard to believe we shall indeed be sanctified when we seem to be abandoned to sinful habit; hard to pass all through life with some pain, or some crushing trouble, or some

harassing anxiety, or some unsatisfied craving. It is easy to start with faith, most trying to endure patiently to the end. It is thus God educates His children. Compelled to wait for some crowning gift, we cannot but study God's ways. It is thus we are forced to look below the surface of life to its hidden meanings and to construe God's dealings with ourselves apart from the experience of other men. It is thus we are taught actually to loosen our hold of things temporal and to lay hold on what is spiritual and real. He who leaves himself in God's hand will one day declare that the pains and sorrows he suffered were trifling in comparison with what he has won from them.

But Sarah could not wait. She seems to have fixed ten years as the period during which she would wait; but at the expiry of this term she considered herself justified in helping forward God's tardy providence by steps of her own. One cannot severely blame her. When our hearts are set upon some definite blessing, things seem to move too slowly and we can scarcely refrain from urging them on without too scrupulously enquiring into the character of our methods. We are willing to wait for a certain time, but beyond that we must take the matter into our own hand. This incident shows, what all life shows, that whatever be the boon you seek, you do yourself an injury if you cease to seek it in the best possible form and manner, and decline upon some lower thing which you can secure by some easy stratagem of your own.

The device suggested by Sarah was so common that the wonder is that it had not long before been tried. Jealousy or instinctive reluctance may have prevented her from putting it in force. She might no doubt have understood that God, always working out His purposes

in consistency with all that is most honourable and pure in human conduct, requires of no one to swerve a hair's breadth from the highest ideal of what a human life should be, and that just in proportion as we seek the best gifts and the most upright and pure path to them does God find it easy to bless us. But in her case it was difficult to continue in this belief; and at length she resolved to adopt the easy and obvious means of obtaining an heir. It was unbelieving and foolish, but not more so than our adoption of practices common in our day and in our business which we know are not the best, but which we nevertheless make use of to obtain our ends because the most righteous means possible do not seem workable in our circumstances. Are you not conscious that you have sometimes used a means of effecting your purpose, which you would shrink from using habitually, but which you do not scruple to use to tide you over a difficulty, an extraordinary device for an extraordinary emergency, a Hagar brought in for a season to serve a purpose, not a Sarah accepted from God and cherished as an eternal helpmeet. It is against this we are here warned. From a Hagar can at the best spring only an Ishmael, while in order to obtain the blessing God intends we must betake ourselves to God's barren-looking means.

The evil consequences of Sarah's scheme were apparent first of all in the tool she made use of. Agur the son of Jakeh says: "For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear. For a servant when he reigneth, and a fool when he is filled with meat; for an odious woman when she is married, and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress." Naturally this half-heathen girl, when she found that

her son would probably inherit all Abram's possessions, forgot herself, and looked down on her present, nominal mistress. A flood of new fancies possessed her vacant mind and her whole demeanour becomes insulting to Sarah. The slave-girl could not be expected to sympathize with the purpose which Abram and Sarah had in view when they made use of her. They had calculated on finding only the unquestioning, mechanical obedience of the slave, even while raising her practically to the dignity of a wife. They had fancied that even to the deepest feelings of her woman's heart, even in maternal hopes, she would be plastic in their hands, their mere passive instrument. But they have entirely miscalculated. The slave has feelings as quick and tender as their own, a life and a destiny as tenaciously clung to as their God-appointed destiny. Instead of simplifying their life they have merely added to it another source of complexity and annoyance. It is the common fate of all who use others to satisfy their own desires and purposes. The instruments they use are never so soulless and passive as it is wished. If persons cannot serve you without deteriorating in their own character, you have no right to ask them to serve you. To use human beings as if they were soulless machines is to neglect radical laws and to inflict the most serious injury on our fellow-men. Mistresses who do not treat their servants with consideration, recognising that they are as truly women as themselves, with all a woman's hopes and feelings, and with a life of their own to live, are committing a grievous wrong, and evil will come of it.

In such an emergency as now arose in Abram's household, character shows itself clearly. Sarah's vexation at the success of her own scheme, her re-

crimination and appeal for strange justice, her unjustifiable treatment of Hagar, Abram's Bedouin disregard of the jealousies of the women's tent, his Gallio-like repudiation of judgment in such quarrels, his regretful vexation and shame that through such follies, mistakes, and wranglings, God had to find a channel for His promise to flow—all this discloses the painful ferment into which Abram's household was thrown. Sarah's attempt to rid herself with a high hand of the consequences of her scheme was signally unsuccessful. In the same inconsiderate spirit in which she had put Hagar in her place, she now forces her to flee, and fancies that she has now rid herself and her household of all the disagreeable consequences of her experiment. She is grievously mistaken. The slave comes back upon her hands, and comes back with the promise of a son who should be a continual trouble to all about him. All through Ishmael's boyhood Abram and Sarah had painfully to reap the fruits of what they had sown. We only make matters worse when we endeavour by injustice and harshness to crush out the consequences of wrong-doing. The difficulties into which sin has brought us can only be effectually overcome by sincere contrition and humiliation. It is not all in a moment nor by one happy stroke you can rectify the sin or mistake of a moment. If by your wise devices you have begotten young Ishmaels, if something is every day grieving you and saying to you, "This comes of your careless inconsiderate conduct in the past," then see that in your vexation there is real penitence and not a mere indignant resentment against circumstances or against other people, and see that you are not actually continuing the fault which first gave birth to your present sorrow and entanglement.

When Hagar fled from her mistress she naturally took the way to her old country. Instinctively her feet carried her to the land of her birth. And as she crossed the desert country where Palestine, Egypt and Arabia meet, she halted by a fountain, spent with her flight and awed by the solitude and stillness of the desert. Her proud spirit is broken and tamed, the fond memories of her adopted home and all its customs and ways and familiar faces and occupations, overtake her when she pauses and her heart reacts from the first excitement of hasty purpose and reckless execution. To whom could she go in Egypt? Was there one there who would remember the little slave girl or who would care to show her a kindness? Has she not acted madly in fleeing from her only protectors? The desolation around her depicts her own condition. No motion stirs as far as her eye can reach, no bird flies, no leaf trembles, no cloud floats over the scorching sun, no sound breaks the death-like quiet; she feels as if in a tomb, severed from all life, forgotten of all. Her spirit is breaking under this sense of desolation, when suddenly her heart stands still as she hears a voice utter her own name "Hagar, Sarai's maid." As readily as every other person when God speaks to them, does Hagar recognise Who it is who has followed her into this blank solitude. In her circumstances to hear the voice of God left no room for disobedience. The voice of God made audible through the actual circumstances of our daily life acquires a force and an authority we never attached to it otherwise.

Probably, too, Hagar would have gone back to Abram's tents at the bidding of a less authoritative voice than this. Already she was softening and repenting. She but needed some one to say, "Go back."

You may often make it easier for a proud man to do a right thing by giving him a timely word. Frequently men stand in the position of Hagar, knowing the course they ought to adopt and yet hesitating to adopt it until it is made easy to them by a wise and friendly word.

In the promise of a son which was here given to Hagar and the prediction concerning his destiny, while there was enough to teach both her and Abram that he was not to be the heir of the promise, there was also much to gratify a mother's pride and be to Hagar a source of continual satisfaction. The son was to bear a name which should commemorate God's remembrance of her in her desolation. As often as she murmured it over the babe or called it to the child or uttered it in sharp remonstrance to the refractory boy, she was still reminded that she had a helper in God who had heard and would hear her. The prediction regarding the child has been strikingly fulfilled in his descendants; the three characteristics by which they are distinguished being precisely those here mentioned. "He will be a wild man," literally, "a wild ass among men," reminding us of the description of this animal in Job: "Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwelling. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing." Like the zebra that cannot be domesticated, the Arab scorns the comforts of civilized life, and adheres to the primitive dress, food, and mode of life, delighting in the sensation of freedom, scouring the deserts, sufficient with his horse and spear for every emergency. His hand also is against every man, looking on all as his natural enemies or as his

natural prey; in continual feud of tribe against tribe and of the whole race against all of different blood and different customs. And yet he "dwells in the presence of his brethren;" though so warlike a temper would bode his destruction and has certainly destroyed other races, this Ishmaelite stock continues in its own lands with an uninterrupted history. In the words of an authoritative writer: "They have roved like the moving sands of their deserts; but their race has been rooted while the individual wandered. That race has neither been dissipated by conquest, nor lost by migration, nor confounded with the blood of other countries. They have continued to dwell in the presence of all their brethren, a distinct nation, wearing upon the whole the same features and aspects which prophecy first impressed upon them."

What struck Hagar most about this interview was God's presence with her in this remote solitude. She awakened to the consciousness that duty, hope, God, are ubiquitous, universal, carried in the human breast, not confined to any place. Her hopes, her haughtiness, her sorrows, her flight, were all known. The feeling possessed her which was afterwards expressed by the Psalmist: "Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. Thou tellest my wanderings; put Thou my tears in Thy bottle; are they not in Thy book?" Even here where I thought to have escaped every eye, have I been following and at length found Him that seeth me. As truly and even more perceptibly than in Abram's tents, God is with her here in the desert. To evade duty, to leave responsibility behind us, is impossible. In all places we are

God's children, bound to accept the responsibilities of our nature. In all places God is with us, not only to point out our duty but to give us the feeling that in adhering to duty we adhere to Him, and that it is because He values us that He presses duty upon us. With Him is no respect of persons; the servant is in his sight as vivid a personality as the mistress, and God appears not to the overbearing mistress but to the overborne servant.

Happy they who when God has thus met them and sent them back on their own footsteps, a long and weary return, have still been so filled with a sense of God's love in caring for them through all their errors, that they obey and return. All round about His people does God encamp, all round about His flock does the faithful Shepherd watch and drive back upon the fold each wanderer. Not only to those who are consciously seeking Him does God reveal Himself, but often to us at the very farthest point of our wandering, at our extremity, when another day's journey would land us in a region from which there is no return. When our regrets for the past become intolerably poignant and bitter; when we see a waste of years behind us barren as the sand of the desert, with nothing done but what should but cannot be undone; when the heart is stupefied with the sense of its madness and of the irretrievable loss it has sustained, or when we look to the future and are persuaded little can grow up in it out of such a past, when we see that all that would have prepared us for it has been lightly thrown aside or spent recklessly for nought, when our hearts fail us, this is God besetting us behind and before. And may He grant us strength to pray, "Show me Thy ways, O Lord, teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me:

for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day."

The quiet glow of hopefulness with which Hagar returned to Abram's encampment should possess the spirit of every one of us. Hagar's prospects were not in all respects inviting. She knew the kind of treatment she was likely to receive at the hands of Sarah. She was to be a bondwoman still. But God had persuaded her of His care and had given her a hope large enough to fill her heart. That hope was to be fulfilled by a return to the home she had fled from, by a humbling and painful experience. There is no person for whom God has not similar encouragement. Frequently persons forget that God is in their life, fulfilling His purposes. They flee from what is painful; they lose their bearings in life and know not which way to turn; they do not fancy there is help for them in God. Yet God is with them; by these very circumstances that reduce them to desolateness and despair He leads them to hope in Him. Each one of us has a place in His purpose; and that place we shall find not by fleeing from what is distressing but by submitting ourselves cheerfully to what He appoints. God's purpose is real, and life is real, meant to accomplish not our present passing pleasure, but lasting good in conformity with God's purpose. Be sure that when you are bidden back to duties that seem those of a slave, you are bidden to them by God, Whose purposes are worthy of Himself and Whose purposes include you and all that concerns you.

There are, I think, few truths more animating than this which is here taught us, that God has a purpose with each of us; that however insignificant we seem, however friendless, however hardly used, however

ousted even from our natural place in this world's households, God has a place for us; that however we lose our way in life we are not lost from His eye; that even when we do not think of choosing Him He in His Divine, all-embracing love chooses us, and throws about us bonds from which we cannot escape. Of Hagar many were complacently thinking it was no great matter if she were lost, and some might consider themselves righteous because they said she deserved whatever mishap might befall her. But not so God. Of some of us, it may be, others may think no great blank would be made by our loss; but God's compassion and care and purpose comprehend the least worthy. The very hairs of your head are all numbered by Him. Nothing is so trivial and insignificant as to escape His attention, nothing so intractable that He cannot use it for good. Trust in Him, obey Him, and your life will yet be useful and happy.

XIII.

THE COVENANT SEALED.

GENESIS xvii.

ACCORDING to the dates here given fourteen years had passed since Abram had received any intimation of God's will regarding him. Since the covenant had been made some twenty years before, no direct communication had been received; and no message of any kind since Ishmael's birth. It need not, therefore, surprise us that we are often allowed to remain for years in a state of suspense, uncertain about the future, feeling that we need more light and yet unable to find it. All truth is not discovered in a day, and if that on which we are to found for eternity take us twenty years or a life's experience to settle it in its place, why should we on this account be overborne with discouragement? They who love the truth and can as little abstain from seeking it as the artist can abstain from admiring what is lovely, will assuredly have their reward. To be expectant yet not impatient, unsatisfied yet not unbelieving, to hold mind and heart open, assured that light is sown for the upright and that all that is has lessons for the teachable, this is our proper attitude.

Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking?

We appreciate the significance of a revelation in proportion as we understand the state of mind to which it is made. Abram's state of mind is disclosed in the exclamation: "Oh, that Ishmael might live before Thee!" He had learned to love the bold, brilliant, domineering boy. He saw how the men liked to serve him and how proud they were of the young chief. No doubt his wild intractable ways often made his father anxious. Sarah was there to point out and exaggerate all his faults and to prognosticate mischief. But there he was, in actual flesh and blood, full of life and interest in everything, daily getting deeper into the affections of Abram, who allowed and could not but allow his own life to revolve very much around the dashing, attractive lad. So that the reminder that he was not the promised heir was not entirely welcome. When he was told that the heir of promise was to be Sarah's child, he could not repress the somewhat peevish exclamation: "Oh, that Ishmael might serve Thy turn!" Why call me off again from this actual attainment to the vague, shadowy, non-existent heir of promise, who surely can never have the brightness of eye and force of limb and lordly ways of this Ishmael? Would that what already exists in actual substance before the eye might satisfy Thee and fulfil Thine intention and supersede the necessity of further waiting! Must I again loosen my hold, and part with my chief attainment? Must I cut my moorings and launch again upon this ocean of faith with a horizon always receding and that seems absolutely boundless?

We are familiar with this state of mind. We wish God would leave us alone. We have found a very attractive substitute for what He promises, and we resent being reminded that our substitute is not, after

all, the veritable, eternal, best possession. It satisfies our taste, our intellect, our ambition; it sets us on a level with other men and gives us a place in the world; but now and again we feel a void it does not fill. We have attained comfortable circumstances, success in our profession, our life has in it that which attracts applause and sheds a brilliance over it; and we do not like being told that this is not all. Our feeling is Oh, that this might do! that this might be accepted as perfect attainment! it satisfies me (all but a little bit); might it not satisfy God? Why summon me again away from domestic happiness, intellectual enjoyment, agreeable occupations, to what really seems so unattainable as perfect fellowship with God in the fulfilment of His promise? Why spend all my life in waiting and seeking for high spiritual things when I have so much with which I can be moderately satisfied? For our complaint often is not that God gives so little but that He offers too much, more than we care to have: that He never will let us be content with anything short of what perfectly fulfils His perfect love and purpose.

This being Abram's state of mind, he is aroused from it by the words: "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me and be thou perfect." I am the Almighty God, able to fulfil your highest hopes and accomplish for you the brightest ideal that ever My words set before you. There is no need of paring down the promise till it square with human probabilities, no need of relinquishing one hope it has begotten, no need of adopting some interpretation of it which may make it seem easier to fulfil, and no need of striving to fulfil it in any second-rate way. All possibility lies in this: I am the Almighty God. Walk before Me and be thou perfect, therefore. Do not train your eye to earthly distances

and earthly magnitudes and limit your hope accordingly, but live in the presence of the Almighty God. Do not defer the advices of conscience and of your purest aspirations to some other possible world; do not settle down at the low level of godless nature and of the men around you; do not give way to what you yourself know to be weakness and evidence of defeat; do not let self-indulgence take the place of My commandments, indolence supplant resolution and the likelihoods of human calculation obliterate the hopes stirred by the Divine call: Be thou perfect. Is not this a summons that comes appropriately to every man? Whatever be our contentment, our attainments, our possessions, a new light is shed upon our condition when we measure it by God's idea and God's resources. Is my life God's ideal? Does that which satisfies me satisfy Him?

The purpose of God's present appearance to Abram was to renew the covenant, and this He does in terms so explicit, so pregnant, so magnificent that Abram must have seen more distinctly than ever that he was called to play a very special part in God's providence. That kings should spring from him, a mere pastoral nomad in an alien country, could not suggest itself to Abram as a likely thing to happen. Indeed, though a line of kings or two lines of kings did spring from him through Isaac, the terms of the prediction seem scarcely exhausted by that fulfilment. And accordingly Paul without hesitation or reserve transfers this prediction to a spiritual region, and is at pains to show that the many nations of whom Abram was to be the father, were not those who inherited his blood, his natural appearance, his language and earthly inheritance, but those who inherited his spiritual qualities and the heritage in God to which his faith gave him entrance.

And he argues that no difference of race or disadvantages of worldly position can prevent any man from serving himself heir to Abram, because the seed to whom as well as to Abram the promise was made, was Christ, and in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, but all are one.

In connection then with this covenant in which God promised that He would be a God to Abram and to his seed, two points of interest to us emerge. First that Christ is Abram's heir. In His use of God's promise we see its full significance. In His life-long appropriation of God we see what God meant when He said, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed." We find our Lord from the first living as one who felt His life encompassed by God, embraced and comprehended in that higher life which God lives through all and in all. His life was all and whole a life in God. He recognised what it is to have a God, one Whose will is supreme and unerringly good, Whose love is constant and eternal, Who is the first and the last, beyond Whom and from under Whom we can never pass. He moved about in the world in so perfectly harmonious a correspondence with God, so merging Himself in God and His purpose and with so unhesitating a reliance upon Him, that He seemed and was but a manifestation of God, God's will embodied, God's child, God expressing Himself in human nature. He showed us once for all the blessedness of true dependence, fidelity and faith. He showed us how that simple promise 'I will be a God to thee,' received in faith, lifts the human life into fellowship with all that is hopeful and inspiring, with all that is purifying, with all that is real and abiding.

But a second point is, that Jesus was the heir of Abram not merely because He was his descendant, a

Jew with all the advantages of the Jew, but because, like Abram, He was full of faith. God was the atmosphere of His life. But He claimed God not because He was Jewish, but because He was human. Through the Jews God had made Himself known, but it was to what was human not to what was Jewish He appealed. And it was as Son of man not as son of Israel or of Adam that Jesus responded to God and lived with Him as His God. Not by specially Jewish rites did Jesus approach and rest in God, but by what is universal and human, by prayer to the Father, by loving obedience, by faith and submission. And thus we too may be joint-heirs with Christ and possess God. And if we think of ourselves as left to struggle with natural defects amidst irreversible natural laws; if we begin to pray very heartlessly, as if He who once listened were now asleep or could do nothing; if our life seems profitless, purposeless, and all unhinged; then let us look back to this sure promise of God, that He will be our God: *our* God, for, if Christ's God, then ours, for if we be Christ's then are we Abram's seed and heirs according to the promise. How few in any given day are living on this promise: how few attach reality to God's continuous revelation of Himself, the reality in this world's transitory history: how few can believe in the nearness and observance and love of God, how few can strenuously seek to be holy or understand where abiding happiness is to be found; for all these things are here. Yet who knocks at this door? Who makes, as Christ made, his life a unity with God, undismayed, unmurmuring, unreluctant, neither fearful of God nor disobedient, but diligent, earnest, jubilant, because God has said, 'I will be thy God." Do you believe these things and can you forbear to use them? Do you

believe that it is open to you, whosoever you are, to have the Eternal and Supreme God for your God, that He may use all His Divine nature in your behalf; have you conceived what it is that God means when He extends to you this offer, and can you decline to accept it, can you do otherwise than cherish it and seek to find more and more in it every day you live?

Two seals were at this time affixed to the covenant: the one for Abram himself, the other for every one who shared with him in his blessings of the covenant. The first consisted in the change of his own name to Abraham, "the father of a multitude," and of his wife's to Sarah, "princess" or "queen," because she was now announced as the destined mother of kings. And however Abraham would be annoyed to see the hardly surpressed smile on the ironical faces of his men as he boldly commanded them to call him by a name whose verification seemed so grievously to lag; and however indignant and pained he may have been to hear the young Ishmael jeering Sarah with her new name, and lending to it every tone of mockery and using it with insolent frequency, yet Abraham knew that these names were not given to deceive; and probably as the name of Abraham has become one of the best known names on earth, so to himself did it quickly acquire a preciousness as God's voice abiding with him, God's promise renewed to him through every man that addressed him, until at length the child of promise lying on his knees took up its first syllable and called him "Abba."

This seal was special to Abraham and Sarah, the other was public. All who desired to partake with Abraham in the security, hope, and happiness of having God as their God, were to submit to circum-

cision. This sign was to determine who were included in the covenant. By this outward mark encouragement and assurance of faith were to be quickened in the heart of all Abraham's descendants.

The mark chosen was significant. It was indeed not distinctive in its outward form; so little so that at this day no fewer than one hundred and fifty millions of the race make use of the same rite for one purpose or other. All the descendants of Ishmael of course continue it, but also all who have their religion, that is, all Mohammedans; but besides these, some tribes in South America, some in Australia, some in the South Sea Islands, and a large number of Kaffir tribes. The ancient Egyptians certainly practised it, and it has been suggested that Abraham may have become acquainted with the practice during his sojourn in Egypt. It is however uncertain whether the practice in Egypt runs back to so early a time. If it were an established Egyptian usage, then of course Hagar would demand for her boy at the usual age the rite which she had always associated with entrance on a new stage of life. But even supposing this was the case, the rite was none the less available for the new use to which it was now put. The rainbow existed before the Flood; bread and wine existed before the night of the Lord's Supper; baptisms of various kinds were practised before the days of the Apostles. And for this very reason, when God desired a natural emblem of the stability of the seasons He chose a striking feature of nature on which men were already accustomed to look with pleasure and hope; when He desired symbols of the body and blood of the Redeemer He took those articles which already had a meaning as the most efficacious human nutriment; when He desired to represent to the eye

the renunciation of the old life and the birth to a new life which we have by union with Christ, He took that rite which was already known as the badge of discipleship; and when He desired to impress men by symbol with the impurity of nature and with our dependence on God for the production of all acceptable life, He chose that rite which, whether used before or not, did most strikingly represent this.

With the significance of circumcision to other men who practise it, we have here nothing to do. It is as the chief sacrament of the old covenant, by which God meant to aid all succeeding generations of Hebrews in believing that God was their God. And this particular mark was given, rather than any other, that they might recognise and ever remember that human nature was unable to generate its own Saviour, that in man there is a native impurity which must be laid aside when he comes into fellowship with the Holy God. And these circumcised races, although in many respects as unspiritual as others, have yet in general perceived that God is different from nature, a Holy Being to Whom we cannot attain by any mere adherence to nature, but only by the aid He Himself extends to us in ways for which nature makes no provision. The lesson of circumcision is an old one and rudely expressed, but it is vital; and no abhorrence of the circumcised for the uncircumcised too strongly, however unjustly, emphasizes the distinction that actually subsists between those who believe in nature and those who believe in God.

The lesson is old, but the circumcision of the heart to which the outward mark pointed, is ever required. That is the true seal of our fellowship with God; the earnest of the Spirit which gives promise of eternal

union with the Holy One; the relentings, the shame the softening of heart, the adoration and reverence for the holiness of God, the thirst for Him, the joy in His goodness, these are the first fruits of the Spirit, which lead on to our calling God Father, and feeling that to be alone with Him is our happiness. It is this putting aside of our natural confidence in nature and absorption in nature, and this turning to God as our confidence and our life, which constitutes the true circumcision of the heart.

Believing as Abraham was, he could not forbear smiling when God said that Sarah would be the mother of the promised seed. This incredulity of Abraham was so significant that it was commemorated in the name of Isaac, the laugher. This heir was typical of all God's best gifts, at first reckoned impossible, at last filling the heart with gladness. The smile of incredulity became the laughter of joy when the child was born and Sarah said, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me." It is they who expect things so incongruous and so impossible to nature unaided that they smile even while they believe, who will one day find their hopes fulfilled and their hearts running over with joyful laughter. If your heart is fixed only on what you can accomplish for yourself, no great joy can ever be yours. But frame your actual hopes in accordance with the promise of God, expect holiness, fulness of joy, animating partnership with God in the highest matters, the resurrection of the dead, the life everlasting, and one day you will say, "God hath made me to laugh." But Abraham prostrating himself to hide a smile is the symbol of our common attitude. We profess to believe in a God of unspeakable power and goodness, but even while we

do so we find it impossible to attach a sense of reality to His promises. They are kindly, well-intentioned words, but are apparently spoken in neglect of solid, obstinate facts. How hard is it for us to learn that God is the great reality, and that the reality of all else may be measured by its relation to Him.

Sarah's laughter had a different meaning. Indeed Sarah does not appear to have been by any means a blameless character. Her conduct towards Hagar showed us that she was a woman capable of generous impulses but not of the strain of continued magnanimous conduct. She was capable of yielding her wifely rights on the impulse of the brilliant scheme that had struck her, but like many other persons who can begin a magnanimous or generous course of conduct, she could not follow it up to the end, but failed disgracefully in her conduct towards her rival. So now again she betrays characteristic weakness. When the strangers came to Abraham's tent, and announced that she was to become a mother, she smiled in superior, self-assured, woman's wisdom. When the promise threatened no longer to hover over her household as a mere sublime and exalting idea which serves its purpose if it keep them in mind that God has spoken to them, but to take place now among the actualities of daily occurrence, she hails this announcement with a laugh of total incredulity. Whatever she had made of God's word, she had not thought it was really and veritably to come to pass; she smiled at the simplicity which could speak of such an unheard-of thing.

This is true to human nature. It reminds you how you have dealt with God's promises,—nay, with God's commandments—when they offered to make room for themselves in the everyday life of which you are

masters, every detail of which you have arranged, seeming to know absolutely the laws and principles on which your particular line of life must be carried on. Have you never smiled at the simplicity which could set about making actual, about carrying out in practical life, in society, in work, in business, those thoughts, feelings and purposes, which God's promises beget? Sarah did not laugh outright, but smiled behind the Lord; she did not mock Him to His face, but let the compassionate expression pass over her face with which we listen to the glowing hopes of the young enthusiast who does not know the world. Have we not often put aside God's voice precisely thus; saying within us, We know what kind of things can be done by us and others and what need not be attempted; we know what kind of frailties in social intercourse we must put up with, and not seek to amend; what kind of practices it is vain to think of abolishing; we know what use to make of God's promise and what use not to make of it; how far to trust it, and how far to give greater weight to our knowledge of the world and our natural prudence and sense? Does not our faith, like Sarah's, vary in proportion as the promise to be believed is unpractical? If the promise seems wholly to concern future things, we cordially and devoutly assent; but if we are asked to believe that God intends within the year to do so-and-so, if we are asked to believe that the result of God's promise will be found taking a substantial place among the results of our own efforts—then the derisive smile of Sarah forms on our face.

To look at the crowds of persons professing religion, one would suppose nothing was commoner than faith. There is nothing rarer. Devoutness is common;

righteousness of life is common; a contempt for every kind of fraud and underhand practice is common; a highminded disregard for this world's gains and glories is common; an abhorrence of sensuality and an earnest thirst for perfection are common—but faith? Will the Son of man when He comes find it on earth? May not the messengers of God yet say, Who hath believed our report? Why, the great majority of Christian people have never been near enough to spiritual things to know whether they are or are not, they have never narrowly weighed spiritual issues and trembled as they watched the uncertain balance, they say they believe God and a future of happiness because they really do not know what they are talking about—they have not measured the magnitude of these things. Faith is not a blind and careless assent to matters of indifference, faith is not a state of mental suspense with a hope that things may turn out to be as the Bible says. Faith is the firm persuasion that these things are so. And he who at once knows the magnitude of these things and believes that they are so, must be filled with a joy that makes him independent of the world, with an enthusiasm which must seem to the world like insanity. It is quite a different world in which the man of faith lives.

XIV.

ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION FOR SODOM.

GENESIS xviii.

THE scene with which this chapter opens is one familiar to the observer of nomad life in the East. During the scorching heat and glaring light of noon, while the birds seek the densest foliage and the wild animals lie panting in the thicket and everything is still and silent as midnight, Abraham sits in his tent door under the spreading oak of Mamre. Listless, languid, and dreamy as he is, he is at once aroused into brightest wakefulness by the sudden apparition of three strangers. Remarkable as their appearance no doubt must have been, it would seem that Abraham did not recognise the rank of his visitors; it was, as the writer to the Hebrews says, "unawares" that he entertained angels. But when he saw them stand as if inviting invitation to rest, he treated them as hospitality required him to treat any wayfarers. He sprang to his feet, ran and bowed himself to the ground, and begged them to rest and eat with him. With the extraordinary, and as it seems to our colder nature extravagant courtesy of an Oriental, he rates at the very lowest the comforts he can supply; it is only a little water he can give to wash their feet, a morsel of bread to help them on their way, but they

will do him a kindness if they accept these small attentions at his hands. He gives, however, much more than he offered, seeks out the fatted calf and serves while his guests sit and eat. The whole scene is primitive and Oriental, and "presents a perfect picture of the manner in which a modern Bedawee Sheykh receives travellers arriving at his encampment;" the hasty baking of bread, the celebration of a guest's arrival by the killing of animal food not on other occasions used even by large flock-masters; the meal spread in the open air, the black tents of the encampment stretching back among the oaks of Mamre, every available space filled with sheep, asses, camels,—the whole is one of those clear pictures which only the simplicity of primitive life can produce.

Not only, however, as a suitable and pretty introduction which may ensure our reading the subsequent narrative is it recorded how hospitably Abraham received these three. Later writers saw in it a picture of the beauty and reward of hospitality. It is very true, indeed, that the circumstances of a wandering pastoral life are peculiarly favourable to the cultivation of this grace. Travellers being the only bringers of tidings are greeted from a selfish desire to hear news as well as from better motives. Life in tents, too, of necessity makes men freer in their manners. They have no door to lock, no inner rooms to retire to, their life is spent outside, and their character naturally inclines to frankness and freedom from the suspicions fears, and restraints of city life. Especially is hospitality accounted the indispensable virtue, and a breach of it as culpable as a breach of the sixth commandment, because to refuse hospitality is in many regions equivalent to subjecting a wayfarer to

dangers and hardships under which he is almost certain to succumb.

> "This tent is mine," said Yussouf, "but no more
> Than it is God's; come in, and be at peace;
> Freely shalt thou partake of all my store,
> As I of His Who buildeth over these
> Our tents His glorious roof of night and day,
> And at Whose door none ever yet heard Nay."

Still we are of course bound to import into our life all the suggestions of kindly conduct which any other style of living gives us. And the writer to the Hebrews pointedly refers to this scene and says, "Let us not be forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." And often in quite a prosaic and unquestionable manner does it become apparent to a host, that the guest he has been entertaining has been sent by God, an angel indeed ministering to his salvation, renewing in him thoughts that had been dying out, filling his home with brightness and life like the smile of God's own face, calling out kindly feelings, provoking to love and to good works, effectually helping him onwards and making one more stage of his life endurable and even blessed. And it is not to be wondered at that our Lord Himself should have continually inculcated this same grace; for in His whole life and by His most painful experience were men being tested as to who among them would take the stranger in. He who became man for a little that He might for ever consecrate the dwelling of Abraham and leave a blessing in his household, has now become man for evermore, that we may learn to walk carefully and reverentially through a life whose circumstances and conditions, whose little socialities and duties, and whose great trials and strains He found

fit for Himself for service to the Father. This tabernacle of our human body has by His presence been transformed from a tent to a temple, and this world and all its ways that He approved, admired, and walked in, is holy ground. But as He came to Abraham trusting to his hospitality, not sending before him a legion of angels to awe the patriarch but coming in the guise of an ordinary wayfarer; so did He come to His own and make His entrance among us, claiming only the consideration which He claims for the least of His people, and granting to whoever gave Him *that* the discovery of His Divine nature. Had there been ordinary hospitality in Bethlehem that night before the taxing, then a woman in Mary's condition had been cared for and not superciliously thrust among the cattle, and our race had been delivered from the everlasting reproach of refusing its God a cradle to be born and sleep His first sleep in, as it refused Him a bed to die in, and left chance to provide Him a grave in which to sleep His latest sleep. And still He is coming to us all requiring of us this grace of hospitality, not only in the case of every one who asks of us a cup of cold water and whom our Lord Himself will personate at the last day and say, "*I* was a stranger and ye took Me in;" but also in regard to those claims upon our heart's reception which He only in His own person makes.

But while we are no doubt justified in gathering such lessons from this scene, it can scarcely have been for the sake of inculcating hospitality that these angels visited Abraham. And if we ask, Why did God on this occasion use this exceptional form of manifesting Himself; why, instead of approaching Abraham in a vision or in word as had been found sufficient on former occasions, did He now adopt this method of

becoming Abraham's guest and eating with him?—the only apparent reason is that He meant this also to be the test applied to Sodom. There too His angels were to appear as wayfarers, dependent on the hospitality of the town, and by the people's treatment of these unknown visitors their moral state was to be detected and judged. The peaceful meal under the oaks of Mamre, the quiet and confidential walk over the hills in the afternoon when Abraham in the humble simplicity of a godly soul was found to be fit company for these three—this scene where the Lord and His messengers receive a becoming welcome and where they leave only blessing behind them, is set in telling contrast to their reception in Sodom, where their coming was the signal for the outburst of a brutality one blushes to think of, and elicited all the elements of a mere hell upon earth.

Lot would fain have been as hospitable as Abraham. Deeper in his nature than any other consideration was the traditional habit of hospitality. To this he would have sacrificed everything—the rights of strangers were to him truly inviolable. Lot was a man who could as little see strangers without inviting them to his house as Abraham could. He would have treated them handsomely as his uncle; and what he could do he did. But Lot had by his choice of a dwelling made it impossible he should afford safe and agreeable lodging to any visitor. He did his best, and it was not his reception of the angels that sealed Sodom's doom, and yet what shame he must have felt that he had put himself in circumstances in which his chief virtue could not be practised. So do men tie their own hands and cripple themselves so that even the good they would take pleasure in doing is either wholly impossible or turns to evil.

In divulging to Abraham His purpose in visiting

Sodom, it is enounced here that God acted on a principle which seems afterwards to have become almost proverbial. Surely the Lord will do nothing but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets. There are indeed two grounds stated for making known to Abraham this catastrophe. The reason that we should naturally expect, viz. that he might go on and warn Lot is not one of them. Why then make any announcement to Abraham if the catastrophe cannot be averted, and if Abraham is to turn back to his own encampment? The first reason is: "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? *Seeing that Abraham* shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." In other words, Abraham has been made the depository of a blessing for all nations, and account must therefore be given to him when any people is summarily removed beyond the possibility of receiving this blessing. If a man has got a grant for the emancipation of the slaves in a certain district, and is informed on landing to put this grant in force that fifty slaves are to be executed that day, he has certainly a right to know and he will inevitably desire to know that this execution is to be, and why it is to be. When an officer goes to negotiate an exchange of prisoners, if two of the number cannot be exchanged, but are to be shot, he must be informed of this and account of the matter must be given him. Abraham often brooding on God's promise, living indeed upon it, must have felt a vague sympathy with all men, and a sympathy not at all vague, but most powerful and practical with the men in the Jordan valley whom he had rescued from Chedorlaomer. If he was to be a blessing to any nation it must surely be to those who were within an afternoon's walk of his encampment

and among whom his nephew had taken up his abode. Suppose he had not been told, but had risen next morning and seen the dense cloud of smoke overhanging the doomed cities, might he not with some justice have complained that although God had spoken to him the previous day, not one word of this great catastrophe had been breathed to him.

The second reason is expressed in the nineteenth verse; God had chosen Abraham that he might command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment that the Lord might fulfil His promise to Abraham. That is to say, as it was only by obedience and righteousness that Abraham and his seed were to continue in God's favour, it was fair that they should be encouraged to do so by seeing the fruits of unrighteousness. So that as the Dead Sea lay throughout their whole history on their borders reminding them of the wages of sin, they might never fail rightly to interpret its meaning, and in every great catastrophe read the lesson "except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." They could never attribute to chance this predicted judgment. And in point of fact frequent and solemn reference was made to this standing monument of the fruit of sin.

As yet there was no moral law proclaimed by any external authority. Abraham had to discover what justice and goodness were from the dictates of his own conscience and from his observation upon men and things. But he was at all events persuaded that only so long as he and his sought honestly to live in what they considered to be righteousness would they enjoy God's favour. And they read in the destruction of Sodom a clear intimation that certain forms of wickedness were detestable to God.

The earnestness with which Abraham intercedes for the cities of the plain reveals a new side of his character. One could understand a strong desire on his part that Lot should be rescued, and no doubt the preservation of Lot formed one of his strongest motives to intercede, yet Lot is never named, and it is, I think, plain that he had more than the safety of Lot in view. He prayed that the city might be spared, not that the righteous might be delivered out of its ruin. Probably he had a lively interest in the people he had rescued from captivity, and felt a kind of protectorate over them as he sometimes looked down on them from the hills near his own tents. He pleads for them as he had fought for them, with generosity, boldness and perseverance; and it was his boldness and unselfishness in fighting for them that gave him boldness in praying for them.

There has come into vogue in this country a kind of intercession which is the exact reverse of this of Abraham—an obtuse, mechanical intercession about whose efficacy one may cherish a reasonable suspicion. The Bible and common sense bid us pray with the Spirit and with the *understanding;* but at some meetings for prayer you are asked to pray for people you do not know and have no real interest in. You are not told even their names, so that if an answer is sent you could not identify the answer, nor is any clue given you by which if God should propose to use you for their help you could know where the help was to be applied. For all you know the slip of paper handed in among a score of others may misrepresent the circumstances; and even supposing it does not, what likeness to the effectual fervent prayer of an anxious man has the petition that is once read in your hearing and at once and for ever

blotted from your mind by a dozen others of the same kind. Not so did Abraham pray: he prayed for those he knew and had fought for; and I see no warrant for expecting that our prayers will be heard for persons whose good we seek in no other way than prayer, in none of those ways which in all other matters our conduct proves we judge more effectual than prayer. When Lot was carried captive Abraham did not think it enough to put a petition for him in his evening prayer. He went and *did* the needful thing, so that now when there is nothing else he can do but pray, he intercedes, as few of us can without self-reproach or feeling that had we only done our part there might now be no need of prayer. What confidence can a parent have in praying for a son who is going to a country where vice abounds, if he has done little or nothing to infix in his boy's mind a love of virtue? In some cases the very persons who pray for others are themselves the obstacles preventing the answer. Were we to ask ourselves how much we are prepared to do for those for whom we pray, we should come to a more adequate estimate of the fervency and sincerity of our prayers.

The element in Abraham's intercession that jars on the reader is the trading temper that strives always to get the best possible terms. Abraham seems to think God can be beaten down and induced to make smaller and smaller demands. No doubt this style of prayer was suggested to Abraham by the statement on God's part that He was going to Sodom to see if its iniquity was so great as it was reported; that is, to number, as it were, the righteous men in it. Abraham seizes upon this and asks if He would not spare it if fifty were found in it. But Abraham knowing Sodom as he did could not have supposed this number would be

found. Finding, then, that God meets him so far, he goes on step by step getting larger in his demands, until when he comes to ten he feels that to go farther would be intolerably presumptuous. Along with this audacious beating down of God, there is a genuine and profound reverence and humility which at each renewal of the petition dictate some such expression as: "I who am but dust and ashes," "Let not my Lord be angry."

It is remarkable too that, throughout, it is for justice Abraham pleads, and for justice of a limited and imperfect kind. He proceeds on the assumption that the town will be judged as a town, and either wholly saved or wholly destroyed. He has no idea of individual discrimination being made, those only suffering who had sinned. And yet it is this principle of discrimination on which God ultimately proceeds, rescuing Lot. Yet is not this intercession the history of what every one who prays passes through, beginning with the idea that God is to be won over to more liberal views and a more munificent intention, and ending with the discovery that God gives what we should count it shameless audacity to ask? We begin to pray,

> "As if ourselves were better certainly
> Than what we come to—Maker and High Priest"

and we leave off praying assured that the whole is to be managed by a righteousness and love and wisdom, which we cannot plan for, which any love or desire of ours would only limit the action of, and which must be left to work out its own purposes in its own marvellous ways. We begin, feeling that we have to beat down a reluctant God and that we can guide the

mind of God to some better thing than He intends: when the answer comes we recognise that what we set as the limit of our expectation God has far overstepped, and that our prayer has done little more than show our inadequate conception of God's mercy.

Not only in this respect but throughout this chapter there is betrayed an inadequate conception of God. The language is adapted to the use of men who are as yet unable to conceive of one Infinite, Eternal Spirit. They think of Him as one who needs to come down and institute an inquiry into the state of Sodom, if He is to know with accuracy the moral condition of its inhabitants. We can freely use the same language, but we put into it a meaning that the words do not literally bear: Abraham and his contemporaries used and accepted the words in their literal sense. And yet the man who had ideas of God in some respects so rudimentary was God's Friend, received singular tokens of His favour, found His whole life illuminated with His presence, and was used as the point of contact between heaven and earth, so that if you desire the first lessons in the knowledge of God which will in time grow into full information, it is to the tent of Abraham, you must go. This surely is encouraging; for who is not conscious of much difficulty in thinking rightly of God? Who does not feel that precisely here, where the light should be brightest, clouds and darkness seem to gather? It may indeed be said that what was excusable in Abraham is inexcusable in us; that we have that day, that full noon of Christ to which he could only, out of the dusky dawn, look forward. But after all may not a man with some justice say: Give me an afternoon with God, such as Abraham had; give me the opportunity of converse with a God submitting Himself to

question and answer, to those means and instruments of ascertaining truth which I daily employ in other matters, and I will ask no more? Christ has given us entrance into the final stage of our knowledge of God, teaching us that God is a Spirit and that we cannot see the Father; that Christ Himself left earth and withdrew from the bodily eye that we might rely more upon spiritual modes of apprehension and think of God as a Spirit. But we are not at all times able to receive this teaching, we are children still and fall back with longing for the times when God walked and spoke with man. And this being so, we are encouraged by the experience of Abraham. We shall not be disowned by God though we do not know Him perfectly. We can but begin where we are, not pretending that that is clear and certain to us which in fact is not so, but freely dealing with God according to the light we have, hoping that we too, like Abraham, shall see the day of Christ and be glad; shall one day stand in the full light of ascertained and eternal truth, knowing as we are known.

In conclusion, we shall find when we read the following chapter, and especially the prayer of Lot that he might not be driven to the wild mountain district, but might occupy the little town of Zoar which was saved for his sake—we shall find, that much light is reflected on this prayer of Abraham. Without trenching on what may be more fitly spoken of afterwards, it may now be observed that the difference between Lot and Abraham, as between man and man generally, comes out nowhere more strikingly than in their prayers. Abraham had never prayed for himself with a tithe of the persistent earnestness with which he prays for Sodom—a town which was much indebted to him, but towards which

for more reasons than one a smaller man would have borne a grudge. Lot, on the other hand, much indebted to Sodom, identified indeed with it, one of its leading citizens, connected by marriage with its inhabitants, is in no agony about its destruction, and has indeed but one prayer to offer, and that is, that when all his fellow-townsmen are destroyed, he may be comfortably provided for. While the men he has bargained and feasted with, the men he has made money out of and married his daughters to, are in the agonies of an appalling catastrophe and so near that the smoke of their torment sweeps across his retreat, he is so disengaged from regrets and compassion that he can nicely weigh the comparative comfort and advantage of city and rural life. One would have thought better of the man if he had declined the angelic rescue and resolved to stand by those in death whose society he had so coveted in life. And it is significant that while the generous, large-hearted, devout pleading of Abraham is in vain, the miserable, timorous, selfish petition of Lot is heard and answered. It would seem as if sometimes God were hopeless of men, and threw to them in contempt the gifts they crave, giving them the poor stations in this life their ambition is set upon, because He sees they have made themselves incapable of enduring hardness, and so quelling their lower nature. An answered prayer is not always a blessing, sometimes it is a doom: "He sent them meat to the full: but while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them and slew the fattest of them."

Probably had Lot felt any inclination to pray for his townsmen he would have seen that for him to do so would be unseemly. His circumstances, his long association with the Sodomites, and his accommodation

of himself to their ways had both eaten the soul out of him and set him on quite a different footing towards God from that occupied by Abraham. A man cannot on a sudden emergency lift himself out of the circumstances in which he has been rooted, nor peel off his character as if it were only skin deep. Abraham had been living an unworldly life in which intercourse with God was a familiar employment. His prayer was but the seasonable flower of his life, nourished to all its beauty by the habitual nutriment of past years. Lot in his need could only utter a peevish, pitiful, childish cry. He had aimed all his life at being comfortable, he could not now wish anything more than to be comfortable. "Stand out of my sunshine," was all he could say, when he held by the hand the plenipotentiary of heaven, and when the roar of the conflict of moral good and evil was filling his ears—a decent man, a righteous man, but the world had eaten out his heart till he had nothing to keep him in sympathy with heaven.

Such is the state to which men in our society, as in Sodom, are brought by risking their spiritual life to make the most of this world.

XV.

DESTRUCTION OF THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN.

GENESIS xix.

WHILE Abraham was pleading with the Lord the angels were pursuing their way to Sodom. And in doing so they apparently observed the laws of those human forms which they had assumed. They did not spread swift wings and alight early in the afternoon at the gates of the city; but taking the usual route, they descended from the hills which separated Abraham's encampment from the plain of the Jordan, and as the sun was setting reached their destination. In the deep recess which is found at either side of the gateway of an Eastern city, Lot had taken his accustomed seat. Wearied and vexed with the din of the revellers in the street, and oppressed with the sultry doom-laden atmosphere, he was looking out towards the cool and peaceful hills, purple with the sinking sun behind them, and letting his thoughts first follow and then outrun his eye; he was now picturing and longing for the unseen tents of Abraham, and almost hearing the cattle lowing round at evening and all the old sounds his youth had made familiar.

He is recalled to the actual present by the footfall of the two men, and little knowing the significance of his act, invites them to spend the night under his

roof. It has been observed that the historian seems to intend to bring out the quietness and the ordinary appearance of the entire circumstances. All goes on as usual. There is nothing in the setting sun to say that for the last time it has shone on these rich meadows, or that in twelve hours its rising will be dimmed by the smoke of the burning cities. The ministers of so appalling a justice as was here displayed enter the city as ordinary travellers. When a crisis comes, men do not suddenly acquire an intelligence and insight they have not habitually cultivated. They cannot suddenly put forth an energy nor exhibit an apt helpfulness which only character can give. When the test comes, we stand or fall not according to what we would wish to be and now see the necessity of being, but according to what former self-discipline or self-indulgence has made us.

How then shall this angelic commission of enquiry proceed? Shall it call together the elders of Sodom—or shall it take Lot outside the city and cross-examine him, setting down names and dates and seeking to come to a fair judgment. Not at all—there is a much surer way of detecting character than by any process of examination by question and answer. To each of us God says:

> "Since by its *fruit* a tree is judged,
> Show me thy fruit, the *latest act* of thine!
> For in the *last* is summed the first, and all,—
> What thy life last put heart and soul into,
> There shall I taste thy product."

It is thus these angels proceed. They do not startle the inhabitants of Sodom into any abnormal virtue nor present opportunity for any unwonted iniquity. They give them opportunity to act in their usual way.

Nothing could well be more ordinary than the entrance to the city of two strangers at sunset. There is nothing in this to excite, to throw men off their guard, to overbalance the daily habit, or give exaggerated expression to some special feature of character. It is thus we are all judged—by the insignificant circumstances in which we act without reflection, without conscious remembrance of an impending judgment, with heart and soul and full enjoyment.

First Lot is judged. Lot's character is a singularly mixed one. With all his selfishness, he was hospitable and public-spirited. Lover of good living, as undoubtedly he was, his courage and strength of character are yet unmistakable. His sitting at the gate in the evening to offer hospitality may fairly be taken as an indication of his desire to screen the wickedness of his townsmen, and also to shield the stranger from their brutality. From the style in which the mob addressed him, it is obvious that he had made himself offensive by interfering to prevent wrong-doing. He was nicknamed "the Censor," and his eye was felt to carry condemnation. It is true there is no evidence that his opposition had been of the slightest avail. How could it avail with men who knew perfectly well that with all his denunciation of their wicked ways, he preferred their money-making company to the desolation of the hills, where he would be vexed with no filthy conversation, but would also find no markets? Still it is to Lot's credit that in such a city, with none to observe, none to applaud, and none to second him, he should have been able to preserve his own purity of life and steadily to resist wrong-doing. It would be cynical to say that he cultivated austerity and renounced popular vices as a salve to a conscience wounded by his own greed

That he had the courage which lies at the root of strength of character became apparent as the last dark night of Sodom wore on. To go out among a profligate, lawless mob, wild with passion and infuriated by opposition—to go out and shut the door behind him —was an act of true courage. His confidence in the influence he had gained in the town cannot have blinded him to the temper of the raging crowd at his door. To defend his unknown guests he put himself in a position in which men have frequently lost life.

In the first few hours of his last night in Sodom, there is much that is admirable and pathetic in Lot's conduct. But when we have said that he was bold and that he hated other men's sins, we have exhausted the more attractive side of his character. The inhuman collectedness of mind with which, in the midst of a tremendous public calamity, he could scheme for his own private well-being is the key to his whole character. He had no feeling. He was cold-blooded, calculating, keenly alive to his own interest, with all his wits about him to reap some gain to himself out of every disaster; the kind of man out of whom wreckers are made, who can with gusto strip gold rings off the fingers of doomed corpses; out of whom are made the villains who can rifle the pockets of their dead comrades on a battlefield, or the politicians who can still ride on the top of the wave that hurls their country on the rocks. When Abraham gave him his choice of a grazing ground, no rush of feeling, no sense of gratitude, prevented him from making the most of the opportunity. When his house was assailed, he had coolness, when he went out to the mob, to shut the door behind him that those within might not hear his bargain. When the angel, one might almost say, was

flurried by the impending and terrible destruction, and was hurrying him away, he was calm enough to take in at a glance the whole situation and on the spot make provision for himself. There was no need to tell him not to look back as his wife did: no deep emotion would overmaster him, no unconquerable longing to see the last of his dear friends in Sodom would make him lose one second of his time. Even the loss of his wife was not a matter of such importance as to make him forget himself and stand to mourn. In every recorded act of his life appears this same unpleasant characteristic.

Between Lot and Judas there is an instructive similarity. Both had sufficient discernment and decision of character to commit themselves to the life of faith, abandoning their original residence and ways of life. Both came to a shameful end, because the motive even of the sacrifices they made was self-interest. Neither would have had so dark a career had he more justly estimated his own character and capabilities, and not attempted a life for which he was unfit. They both put themselves into a false position; than which nothing tends more rapidly to deteriorate character. Lot was in a doubly false position, because in Sodom as well as in Abraham's shifting camp he was out of place. He voluntarily bound himself to men he could not love. One side of his nature was paralysed; and that the side which in him especially required development. It is the influence of home life, of kindly surroundings, of friendships, of congenial employment, of everything which evokes the free expression of what is best in us; it is this which is a chief factor in the development of every man. But instead of the genial and fertilising influence of worthy friendships, and

ennobling love, Lot had to pretend good-will where he felt none, and deceit and coldness grew upon him in place of charity. Besides, a man in a false position in life, out of which he can by any sacrifice deliver himself, is never at peace with God until he does deliver himself. And any attempt to live a righteous life with an evil conscience is foredoomed to failure.

And if it still be felt that Lot was punished with extreme severity, and that if every man who chose a good grazing ground or a position in life which was likely to advance his fortune were thereby doomed to end his days in a cave and under the darkest moral brand, society would be quite disintegrated, it must be remembered, that in order to advance his interests in life, Lot sacrificed much that a man is bound by all means to cherish; and further, it must be said that our destinies are thus determined. The whole iniquity and final consequences of our disposition are not laid before us in the mass; but to give the rein to any evil disposition is to yield control of our own life and commit ourselves to guidance which cannot result in good, and is of a nature to result in utter shame and wretchedness.

Turning from the rescued to the destroyed, we recognise how sufficient a test of their moral condition the presence of the angels was. The inhabitants of Sodom quickly afford evidence that they are ripe for judgment. They do nothing worse than their habitual conduct led them to do. It is not for this one crime they are punished; its enormity is only the legible instance which of itself convicts them. They are not aware of the frightful nature of the crime they seek to commit. They fancy it is but a renewal of their constant practice. They rush headlong on destruction and do not

know it. How can it be otherwise? If a man *will not* take warning, if he will persist in sin, then the day comes when he is betrayed into iniquity the frightful nature of which he did not perceive, but which is the natural result of the life he has led. He goes on and will not give up his sin till at last the final damning act is committed which seals his doom. Character tends to express itself in one perfectly representative act. The habitual passion, whatever it is, is always alive and seeking expression. Sometimes one consideration represses it, sometimes another; but these considerations are not constant, while the passion is, and must therefore one day find its opportunity—its opportunity not for that moderate, guarded, disguised expression which passes without notice, but for the full utterance of its very essence. So it was here, the whole city, small and great, young and old, from every quarter came together unanimous and eager in prosecuting the vilest wickedness. No further investigation or proof was needed: it has indeed passed into a proverb: "they *declare* their sin as Sodom."

To punish by a special commission of enquiry is quite unusual in God's government. Nations are punished for immorality or for vicious administration of law or for neglect of sanitary principles by the operation of natural laws. That is to say, there is a distinctly traceable connection between the crime and its punishment; the one being the natural cause of the other. That nations should be weakened, depopulated, and ultimately sink into insignificance, is the natural result of a development of the military spirit of a country and the love of glory. That a population should be decimated by cholera or small-pox is the inevitable result of neglecting intelligible laws of health. It seems to

me absurd to put this destruction of Sodom in the same category. The descent of meteoric stones from the sky is not the natural result of immorality. The vices of these cities have disastrous national results which are quite legibly written in some races existing in the present day. We have here to do not with what is natural but with what is miraculous. Of course it is open to any one to say, "It was merely accidental—it was a mere coincidence that a storm of lightning so violent as to set fire to the bituminous soil should rage in the valley, while on the hills a mile or two off all was serene; it was a mere coincidence that meteoric stones or some instrument of conflagration should set on fire just these cities, not only one of them but four of them, and no more." And certainly were there nothing more to go upon than the fact of their destruction, this coincidence, however extraordinary, must still be admitted as wholly natural, and having no relation to the character of the people destroyed. It might be set down as pure accident, and be classed with storms at sea, or volcanic eruptions, which are due to physical causes and have no relation to the moral character of those involved, but indiscriminately destroy all who happen to be present.

But we have to account not only for the fact of the destruction but for its prediction both to Abraham and to Lot. Surely it is only reasonable to allow that such prediction was supernatural; and the prediction being so, it is also reasonable to accept the account of the event given by the predicters of it, and understand it not as an ordinary physical catastrophe, but as an event contrived with a view to the moral character of those concerned, and intended as an infliction of punishment for moral offences. And before we object to a

style of dealing with nations so different from anything we now detect, we must be sure that a quite different style of dealing was not at that time required. If there is an intelligent training of the world, it must follow the same law which requires that a parent deal in one way with his boy of ten and in another with his adult son.

Of Lot's wife the end is recorded in a curt and summary fashion. "His wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." The angel, knowing how closely on the heels of the fugitives the storm would press, had urgently enjoined haste, saying, "Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain." Rapid in its pursuit as a prairie fire, it was only the swift who could escape it. To pause was to be lost. The command, "Look not behind thee" was not given because the scene was too awful to behold for what men can endure, men may behold, and Abraham looked upon it from the hill above. It was given simply from the necessity of the case and from no less practical and more arbitrary reason. Accordingly when the command was neglected, the consequence was felt. Why the infatuated woman looked back one can only conjecture. The woful sounds behind her, the roar of the flame and of Jordan driven back, the crash of falling houses and the last forlorn cry of the doomed cities, all the confused and terrific din that filled her ear, may well have paralysed her and almost compelled her to turn. But the use our Lord makes of her example shows us that He ascribed her turning to a different motive. He uses her as a warning to those who seek to save out of the destruction more than they have time to save, and so lose all. "He which shall be on the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him

not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife." It would seem, then, as if our Lord ascribed her tragic fate to her reluctance to abandon her household stuff. She was a wife after Lot's own heart, who in the midst of danger and disaster had an eye to her possessions. The smell of fire, the hot blast in her hair, the choking smoke of blazing bitumen, suggested to her only the thought of her own house decorations, her hangings, and ornaments, and stores. She felt keenly the hardship of leaving so much wealth to be the mere food of fire. The thought of such intolerable waste made her more breathless with indignation than her rapid flight. Involuntarily as she looks at the bleak, stony mountains before her, she thinks of the rich plain behind; she turns for one last look, to see if it is impossible to return, impossible to save anything from the wreck. The one look transfixes her, rivets her with dismay and horror. Nothing she looked for can be seen; all is changed in wildest confusion. Unable to move, she is overtaken and involved in the sulphurous smoke, the bitter salts rise out of the earth and stifle her and encrust around her and build her tomb where she stands.

Lot's wife by her death proclaims that if we crave to make the best of both worlds, we shall probably lose both. Her disposition is not rare and exceptional as the pillar of salt which was its monument. She is not the only woman whose heart is so fixedly set upon her household possessions that she cannot listen to the angel-voices that would guide her. Are there none but Lot's wife who show that to them there is nothing so important, nothing else indeed to live for at all, but the management of a house and the accumulation of pos-

sessions? If all who are of the same mind as Lot's wife shared her fate the world would present as strange a spectacle as the Dead Sea presents at this day. For radically it was her divided mind which was her ruin. She had good impulses, she saw what she ought to do, but she did not do it with a mind made up. Other things divided her thoughts and diverted her efforts. What else is it ruins half the people who suppose themselves well on the way of life? The world is in their heart; they cannot pursue with undivided mind the promptings of a better wisdom. Their heart is with their treasure, and their treasure is really not in spiritual excellence, not in purity of character, not in the keen bracing air of the silent mountains where God is known, but in the comforts and gains of the luxurious plain behind.

We are to remember Lot's wife that we may bear in mind how possible it is that persons who promise well and make great efforts and bid fair to reach a place of safety may be overtaken by destruction. We can perhaps tell of exhausting effort, we may have outstripped many in practical repentance, but all this may only be petrified by present carelessness into a monument recording how nearly a man may be saved and yet be destroyed. "Have ye suffered all these things in vain, if it be yet in vain?" "Ye have run well, what now hinders you?" The question always is, not, what have you done, but what are you now doing? Up to the site of the pillar, Lot's wife had done as well as Lot, had kept pace with the angels; but her failure at that point destroyed her.

The same urgency may not be felt by all; but it should be felt by all to whose conscience it has been distinctly intimated that they have become involved in

a state of matters which is ruinous. If you are conscious that in your life there are practices which may very well issue in moral disaster, an angel has taken you by the hand and bid you flee. For you to delay is madness. Yet this is what people will do. Sagacious men of the world, even when they see the probability of disaster, cannot bear to come out with loss. They will always wait a little longer to see if they cannot rescue something more, and so start on a fresh course with less inconvenience. They will not understand that it is better to live bare and stripped with a good conscience and high moral achievement, than in abundance with self-contempt. What they have, always seems more to them than what they are.

XVI.

SACRIFICE OF ISAAC.

GENESIS xxii.

THE sacrifice of Isaac was the supreme act of Abraham's life. The faith which had been schooled by so singular an experience and by so many minor trials was here perfected and exhibited as perfect. The strength which he had been slowly gathering during a long and trying life was here required and used. This is the act which shines like a star out of those dark ages, and has served for many storm-tossed souls over whom God's billows have gone, as a mark by which they could still shape their course when all else was dark. The devotedness which made the sacrifice, the trust in God that endured when even such a sacrifice was demanded, the justification of this trust by the event, and the affectionate fatherly acknowledgment with which God gloried in the man's loyalty and strength of character—all so legibly written here—come home to every heart in the time of its need. Abraham has here shown the way to the highest reach of human devotedness and to the heartiest submission to the Divine will in the most heart-rending circumstances. Men and women living our modern life are brought into situations which seem as torturing and overwhelming as those of Abraham, and all who are

in such conditions find, in his loyal trust in God, sympathetic and effectual aid.

In order to understand God's part in this incident and to remove the suspicion that God imposed upon Abraham as a duty what was really a crime, or that He was playing with the most sacred feelings of His servant, there are one or two facts which must not be left out of consideration. In the first place, Abraham did not think it wrong to sacrifice his son. His own conscience did not clash with God's command. On the contrary, it was through his own conscience God's will impressed itself upon him. No man of Abraham's character and intelligence could suppose that any word of God could make that right which was in itself wrong, or would allow the voice of conscience to be drowned by some mysterious voice from without. If Abraham had supposed that in all circumstances it was a crime to take his son's life, he could not have listened to any voice that bade him commit this crime. The man who in our day should put his child to death and plead that he had a Divine warrant for it would either be hanged or confined as insane. No miracle would be accepted as a guarantee for the Divine dictation of such an act. No voice from heaven would be listened to for a moment, if it contradicted the voice of the universal conscience of mankind. But in Abraham's day the universal conscience had only approbation to express for such a deed as this. Not only had the father absolute power over the son, so that he might do with him what he pleased; but this particular mode of disposing of a son would be considered singular only as being beyond the reach of ordinary virtue. Abraham was familiar with the idea that the most exalted form of religious worship was the sacrifice of the first-born.

He felt, in common with godly men in every age, that to offer to God cheap sacrifices while we retain for ourselves what is truly precious, is a kind of worship that betrays our low estimate of God rather than expresses true devotion. He may have been conscious that in losing Ishmael he had felt resentment against God for depriving him of so loved a possession; he may have seen Canaanite fathers offering their children to gods he knew to be utterly unworthy of any sacrifice; and this may have rankled in his mind until he felt shut up to offer his all to God in the person of his son, his only son, Isaac. At all events, however it became his conviction that God desired him to offer his son, this was a sacrifice which was in no respect forbidden by his own conscience.

But although not wrong in Abraham's judgment, this sacrifice was wrong in the eye of God; how then can we justify God's command that He should make it? We justify it precisely on that ground which lies patent on the face of the narrative—God meant Abraham to make the sacrifice in spirit, not in the outward act; He meant to write deeply on the Jewish mind the fundamental lesson regarding sacrifice, that it is in the spirit and will all true sacrifice is made. God intended what actually happened, that Abraham's sacrifice should be complete and that human sacrifice should receive a fatal blow. So far from introducing into Abraham's mind erroneous ideas about sacrifice, this incident finally dispelled from his mind such ideas and permanently fixed in his mind the conviction that the sacrifice God seeks is the devotion of the living soul not the consumption of a dead body. God met him on the platform of knowledge and of morality to which he had attained, and by requiring him to sacrifice his

son taught him and all his descendants in what sense alone such sacrifice can be acceptable. God meant Abraham to sacrifice his son, but not in the coarse material sense. God meant him to yield the lad truly to Him; to arrive at the consciousness that Isaac more truly belonged to God than to him, his father. It was needful that Abraham and Isaac should be in perfect harmony with the Divine will. Only by being really and absolutely in God's hand could they, or can any one, reach the whole and full good designed for them by God.

How old Isaac was at the time of this sacrifice there is no means of accurately ascertaining. He was probably in the vigour of early manhood. He was able to take his share in the work of cutting wood for the burnt offering and carrying the faggots a considerable distance. It was necessary too that this sacrifice should be made on Isaac's part not with the timorous shrinking or ignorant boldness of a boy, but with the full comprehension and deliberate consent of maturer years. It is probable that Abraham was already preparing, if not to yield to Isaac the family headship, yet to introduce him to a share in the responsibilities he had so long borne alone. From the touching confidence in one another which this incident exhibits, a light is reflected on the fond intercourse of former years. Isaac was at that time of life when a son is closest to a father, mature but not independent; when all that a father can do has been done, but while as yet the son has not passed away into a life of his own.

And Isaac was no ordinary son. The man of business who has encouraged and solaced himself in his toil by the hope that his son will reap the fruit of it and make his old age easy and honoured, but who

outlives his son and sees the effort of his life go for nothing, the proprietor who bears an ancient name and sees his heir die—these are familiar objects of pathetic interest, and no heart is so hard as to refuse a tear of sympathy when brought into view of such heart-withering bereavements. But in Abraham all fatherly feelings had been evoked and strengthened and deepened by a quite peculiar experience. By a special and most effectual discipline he had been separated from the objects which ordinarily divide men's attention and eke out their contentment in life, and his whole hopes had been compelled to centre in his son. It was not the perpetuation of a name nor the transmission of a well-known and valuable property; it was not even the gratification of the most justifiable and tender of human affections, that was crushed and thwarted in Abraham by this command; but it was also and especially that hope which had been aroused and fostered in him by extraordinary providences and which concerned, as he believed, not himself alone but all men.

Manifestly no harder task could have been set to Abraham, than that which was imposed on him by the command, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest," this son of thine in whom all the promises are yea and amen to thee, this son for whose sake thou gavest up home and kindred, and banished thy firstborn Ishmael, this son whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt-offering. This son, Abraham might have said, whom I have been taught to cherish, putting aside all other affections that I might love him above all, I am now with my own hand to slay, to slay with all the terrible niceties and formalities of sacrifice *and with all the love and adoration of sacrifice.* I am with my own hand to destroy all that makes life valu-

able to me, and as I do so I am to love and worship Him who commands this sacrifice. I am to go to Isaac, whom I have taught to look forward to the fairest happiest life, and I am to contradict all I ever told him and tell him now that he has only grown to maturity that he might be cut down in the flush and hope of opening manhood. What can Abraham have thought? Possibly the thought would occur that God was now recalling the great gift He had made. There is always enough conscience of sin in the purest human heart to engender self-reproach and fear on the faintest occasion; and when so signal a token of God's displeasure as this was sent, Abraham may well have believed himself to have been unwittingly guilty of some great crime against God, or have now thought with bitterness of the languid devotion he had been offering Him. I have in sacrificing a lamb been as if I had been cutting off a dog's neck, profane and thoughtless in my worship, and now God is solemnising me indeed. I have in thought or desire kept back the prime of my flock, and God is now teaching me that a man may not rob God. Who could have been surprised if in this horror of great darkness the mind of Abraham had become unhinged? Who could wonder if he had slain *himself* to make the loss of Isaac impossible? Who could wonder if he had sullenly ignored the command, waited for further light, or rejected an alliance with God which involved such lamentable conditions? Nothing that could befall him in consequence of disobedience, he might have supposed, could exceed in pain the agony of obedience. And it is always easier to endure the pain inflicted upon us by circumstances than to do with our own hand and free will what we know will involve us in suffering

It is not mere resignation but active obedience that was required of Abraham. His was not the passive resignation of the man out of whose reach death or disaster has swept his dearest treasures, and who is helped to resignation by the consciousness that no murmuring can bring them back—his was the far more difficult active resignation, which has still in possession all that it prizes, and may withhold these treasures if it pleases, but is called by a higher voice than that of self-pleasing to sacrifice them all.

But though Abraham was the chief, he was not the sole actor in this trying scene. To Isaac this was the memorable day of his life, and quiescent and passive as his character seems to have been, it cannot but have been stirred and strained now in every fibre of it. Abraham could not find it in his heart to disclose to his son the object of the journey; even to the last he kept him unconscious of the part he was himself to play. Two long days' journey, days of intense inward commotion to Abraham, they went northward. On the third day the servants were left, and father and son went on alone, unaccompanied and unwitnessed. "So they went," as the narrative twice over says, "both of them together," but with minds how differently filled; the father's heart torn with anguish, and distracted by a thousand thoughts, the son's mind disengaged, occupied only with the new scenes and with passing fancies. Nowhere in the narrative does the completeness of the mastery Abraham had gained over his natural feelings appear more strikingly than in the calmness with which he answers Isaac's question. As they approach the place of sacrifice Isaac observes the silent and awe-struck demeanour of his father, and fears that it may have been through absence of mind he has

neglected to bring the lamb. With a gentle reverence he ventures to attract Abraham's attention: "My father;" and he said, "Here am I, my son." And he said, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" It is one of those moments when only the strongest heart can bear up calmly and when only the humblest faith has the right word to say. "My son, the Lord will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

Not much longer could the terrible truth be hidden from Isaac. With what feelings must he have seen the agonised face of his father as he turned to bind him and as he learned that he must prepare not to sacrifice but to be sacrificed. Here then was the end of those great hopes on which his youth had been fed. What could such contradiction mean? Was he to submit even to his father in such a matter? Why should he not expostulate, resist, flee? Such ideas seem to have found short entertainment in the mind of Isaac. Trained by long experience to trust his father, he obeys without complaint or murmur. Still it cannot cease to be matter of admiration and astonishment that a young man should have been able on so brief a notice, through so shocking a way, and with so startling a reversal of his expectations, to forego all right to choose for himself, and yield himself implicitly to what he believed to be God's will. By a faith so absolute Isaac became indeed the heir of Abraham. When he laid himself on the altar, trusting his father and his God, he came of age as the true seed of Abraham and entered on the inheritance, making God his God. At that supreme moment he made himself over to God, he put himself at God's disposal; if his death was to be helpful in fulfilling God's purpose he was willing to die

It was God's will that must be done, not his. He knew that God could not err, could not harm His people; he was ignorant of the design which his death could fulfil, but he felt sure that his sacrifice was not asked in vain. He had familiarised himself with the thought that he belonged to God; that he was on earth for God's purposes not for his own; so that now when he was suddenly summoned to lay himself formally and finally on God's altar, he did not hesitate to do so. He had learned that there are possessions more worth preserving than life itself, that

> "Manhood is the one immortal thing
> Beneath Time's changeful sky"—

he had learned that "length of days is knowing when to die."

No one who has measured the strain that such sacrifice puts upon human nature can withhold his tribute of cordial admiration for so rare a devotedness, and no one can fail to see that by this sacrifice Isaac became truly the heir of Abraham. And not only Isaac, but every man attains his majority by sacrifice. Only by losing our life do we begin to live. Only by yielding ourselves truly and unreservedly to God's purpose do we enter the true life of men. The giving up of self, the abandonment of an isolated life, the bringing of ourselves into connection with God, with the Supreme and with the whole, this is the second birth. To reach that full stream of life which is moved by God's will and which is the true life of men, we must so give ourselves up to God, that each of His commandments, each of His providences, all by which He comes into connection with us, has its due effect upon us. If we only seek from God help to carry out our own concep-

tion of life, if we only desire His power to aid us in making of this life what we have resolved it shall be, we are far indeed from Isaac's conception of God and of life. But if we desire that God fulfil in us, and through us His own conception of what our life should be, the only means of attaining this desire is to put ourselves fairly into God's hand, unflinchingly to do what we believe to be His will irrespective of present darkness and pain and privation. He who thus bids an honest farewell to earth and lets himself be bound and laid upon God's altar, is conscious that in renouncing himself he has won God and become His heir.

Have you thus given yourselves to God? I do not ask if your sacrifice has been perfect, nor whether you do not ever seek great things still for yourselves; but do you know what it is thus to yield yourself to God, to put God first, yourself second or nowhere? Are you even occasionally quite willing to sink your own interests, your own prospects, your own native tastes, to have your own worldly hopes delayed or blighted, your future darkened? Have you even brought your intellect to bear upon this first law of human life, and determined for yourself whether it is the case or not that man's life, in order to be profitable, joyful, and abiding, must be lived in God? Do you recognise that human life is not for the individual's good, but for the common good, and that only in God can each man find his place and his work? All that we give up to Him we have in an ampler form. The very affections which we are called to sacrifice are purified and deepened rather than lost. When Abraham resigned his son to God and received him back, their love took on a new delicacy and tenderness. They were more than ever to one another after this interference of God. And He

meant it to be so. Where our affections are thwarted or where our hopes are blasted, it is not our injury, but our good, that is meant; a fineness and purity, an eternal significance and depth, are imparted to affections that are annealed by passing through the fire of trial.

Not till the last moment did God interpose with the gladdening words, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." The significance of this was so obvious that it passed into a proverb: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." It was there, and not at any earlier point, Abraham saw the provision that had been made for an offering. Up to the moment when he lifted the knife over all he lived for, it was not seen that other provision was made. Up to the moment when it was indubitable that both he and Isaac were obedient unto death, and when in will and feeling they had sacrificed themselves, no substitute was visible, but no sooner was the sacrifice complete in spirit than God's provision was disclosed. It was the spirit of sacrifice, not the blood of Isaac, that God desired. It was the noble generosity of Abraham that God delighted in, not the fatherly grief that would have followed the actual death of Isaac. It was the heroic submission of father and son that God saw with delight, rejoicing that men were found capable of the utmost of heroism, of patient and unflinching adherence to duty. At any point short of the consummation, interposition would have come too soon, and would have prevented this educative and elevating display of the capacity of men for the utmost that life can require of them. Had the provision of God been made known one minute before the hand of Abraham was raised to

strike, it would have remained doubtful whether in the critical moment one or other of the parties might not have failed. But when the sacrifice was complete, when already the bitterness of death was past, when all the agonizing conflict was over, the anguish of the father mastered, and the dismay of the son subdued to perfect conformity with the supreme will, then the full reward of victorious conflict was given, and God's meaning flashed through the darkness, and His provision was seen.

This is the universal law. We find God's provision only on the mount of sacrifice, not at any stage short of this, but only there. We must go the whole way in faith; what lies before us as duty, we must do; often in darkness and utter misery, seeing no possibility of escape or relief, we must climb the hill where we are to abandon all that has given joy and hope to our life; and not before the sacrifice has been actually made can we enter into the heaven of victory God provides. You may be called to sacrifice your youth, your hopes of a career, your affections, that you may uphold and soothe the lingering days of one to whom you are naturally bound. Or your whole life may have centred in an affection which circumstances demand you shall abandon; you may have to sacrifice your natural tastes and give up almost everything you once set your heart on; and while to others the years bring brightness and variety and scope, to you they may be bringing only monotonous fulfilment of insipid and uncongenial tasks. You may be in circumstances which tempt you to say, Does God see the inextricable difficulty I am in? Does He estimate the pain I must suffer if immediate relief do not come? Is obedience to Him only to involve me in misery from which other men are exempt? You may

even say that although a substitute was found for Isaac, no substitute has been found for the sacrifice you have had to make, but you have been compelled actually to lose what was dear to you as life itself. But when the character has been fully tried, when the utmost good to character has been accomplished, and when delay of relief would only increase misery, then relief comes. Still the law holds good, that as soon as you in spirit yield to God's will, and with a quiet submissiveness consent to the loss or pain inflicted upon you, in that hour your whole attitude to your circumstances is transformed, you find rest and assured hope. Two things are certain: that, however painful your condition is, God's intention is not to injure, but to advance you, and that hopeful submission is wiser, nobler, and every way better than murmuring and resentment.

Finally, these words, "The Lord will provide," which Abraham uttered in that exalted frame of mind which is near to the prophetic ecstasy, have been the burden sung by every sincere and thoughtful worshipper as he ascended the hill of God to seek forgiveness of his sin, the burden which the Lord's worshipping congregation kept on its tongue through all the ages, till at length, as the angel of the Lord had opened the eyes of Abraham to see the ram provided, the voice of the Baptist "crying in the wilderness" to a fainting and well-nigh despairing few turned their eye to God's great provision with the final announcement, "Behold the Lamb of God." Let us accept this as a motto which we may apply, not only in all temporal straits, when we can see no escape from loss and misery, but also in all spiritual emergency, when sin seems a burden too great for us to bear, and when we seem to lie under the uplifted knife of God's judgment. Let us remember that God's

desire is not that we suffer pain, but that we learn obedience, that we be brought to that true and thorough confidence in Him which may fit us to fulfil His loving purposes. Let us, above all, remember that we cannot know the grace of God, cannot experience the abundant provision He has made for weak and sinful men, until we have climbed the mount of sacrifice and are able to commit ourselves wholly to Him. Not by attacking our manifold enemies one by one, nor by attempting the great work of sanctification piecemeal, shall we ever make much growth or progress, but by giving ourselves up wholly to God and by becoming willing to live in Him and as His.

XVII.

ISHMAEL AND ISAAC.

GEN. xxi., xxii.

"Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. * * * Which things are an allegory."—GALATIANS iv. 22.

"Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son."—GENESIS xxii. 10.

IN the birth of Isaac, Abraham at length sees the long-delayed fulfilment of the promise. But his trials are by no means over. He has himself introduced into his family the seeds of discord and disturbance, and speedily the fruit is borne. Ishmael, at the birth of Isaac, was a lad of fourteen years, and, reckoning from Eastern customs, he must have been over sixteen when the feast was made in honour of the weaned child. Certainly he was quite old enough to understand the important and not very welcome alteration in his prospects which the birth of this new son effected. He had been brought up to count himself the heir of all the wealth and influence of Abraham. There was no alienation of feeling between father and son: no shadow had flitted over the bright prospect of the boy as he grew up, when suddenly and unexpectedly there was interposed between him and his expectation the effectual barrier of this child of Sarah's. The importance of this child to the family was in due

course indicated in many ways offensive to Ishmael; and when the feast was made, his spleen could no longer be repressed. This weaning was the first step in the direction of an independent existence, and this would be the point of the feast in celebration. The child was no longer a mere part of the mother, but an individual, a member of the family. The hopes of the parents were carried forward to the time when he should be quite independent of them.

But in all this there was great food for the ridicule of a thoughtless lad. It was precisely the kind of thing which could easily be mocked without any great expenditure of wit by a boy of Ishmael's age. The too visible pride of the aged mother, the incongruity of maternal duties with ninety years, the concentration of attention and honours on so small an object,—all this was, doubtless, a temptation to a boy who had probably at no time too much reverence. But the words and gestures which others might have disregarded as childish frolic, or, at worst, as the unseemly and ill-natured impertinence of a boy who knew no better, stung Sarah, and left a poison in her blood that infuriated her. "Cast out that bondwoman and her son," she demanded of Abraham. Evidently she feared the rivalry of this second household of Abraham, and was resolved it should come to an end. The mocking of Ishmael is but the violent concussion that at last produces the explosion, for which material has long been laid in train. She had seen on Abraham's part a clinging to Ishmael, which she was unable to appreciate. And though her harsh decision was nothing more than the dictate of maternal jealousy, it did prevent things from running on as they were until even a more painful family quarrel must have been the issue

The act of expulsion was itself unaccountably harsh. There was nothing to prevent Abraham sending the boy and his mother under an escort to some safe place; nothing to prevent him from giving the lad some share of his possessions sufficient to provide for him. Nothing of this kind was done. The woman and the boy were simply put to the door; and this, although Ishmael had for years been counted Abraham's heir, and though he was a member of the covenant made with Abraham. There may have been some law giving Sarah absolute power over her maid; but if any law gave her power to do what was now done, it was a thoroughly barbarous one, and she was a barbarous woman who used it.

It is one of those painful cases in which one poor creature, clothed with a little brief authority, stretches it to the utmost in vindictive maltreatment of another. Sarah happened to be mistress, and, instead of using her position to make those under her happy, she used it for her own convenience, for the gratification of her own spite, and to make those beneath her conscious of her power by their suffering. She happened to be a mother, and instead of bringing her into sympathy with all women and their children, this concentrated her affection with a fierce jealousy on her own child. She breathed freely when Hagar and Ishmael were fairly out of sight. A smile of satisfied malice betrayed her bitter spirit. No thought of the sufferings to which she had committed a woman who had served her well for years, who had yielded everything to her will, and who had no other natural protector but her, no glimpses of Abraham's saddened face, visited her with any relentings. It mattered not to her what came of the woman and the boy to whom she really owed a more

loving and careful regard than to any except Abraham and Isaac. It is a story often repeated. One who has been a member of the household for many years is at last dismissed at the dictate of some petty pique or spite as remorselessly and inhumanly as a piece of old furniture might be parted with. Some thoroughly good servant, who has made sacrifices to forward his employer's interest, is at last, through no offence of his own, found to be in his employer's way, and at once all old services are forgotten, all old ties broken, and the authority of the employer, legal but inhuman, is exercised. It is often those who can least defend themselves who are thus treated; no resistance is possible, and also, alas! the party is too weak to face the wilderness on which she is thrown out, and if any cares to follow her history, we may find her at the last gasp under a bush.

Still, both for Abraham and for Ishmael it was better this severance should take place. It was grievous to Abraham; and Sarah saw that for this very reason it was necessary. Ishmael was his first-born, and for many years had received the whole of his parental affection: and, looking on the little Isaac, he might feel the desirableness of keeping another son in reserve, lest this strangely-given child might as strangely pass away. Coming to him in a way so unusual, and having perhaps in his appearance some indication of his peculiar birth, he might seem scarcely fit for the rough life Abraham himself had led. On the other hand, it was plain that in Ishmael were the very qualities which Isaac was already showing that he lacked. Already Abraham was observing that with all his insolence and turbulence there was a natural force and independence of character which might come to be most useful in the patriarchal

household. The man who had pursued and routed the allied kings could not but be drawn to a youth who already gave promise of capacity for similar enterprises —and this youth his own son. But can Abraham have failed to let his fancy picture the deeds this lad might one day do at the head of his armed slaves? And may he not have dreamt of a glory in the land not altogether such as the promise of God encouraged him to look for, but such as the tribes around would acknowledge and fear? All the hopes Abraham had of Ishmael had gained firm hold of his mind before Isaac was born; and before Isaac grew up, Ishmael must have taken the most influential place in the house and plans of Abraham. His mind would thus have received a strong bias towards conquest and forcible modes of advance. He might have been led to neglect, and, perhaps, finally despise, the unostentatious blessings of heaven.

If, then, Abraham was to become the founder, not of one new warlike power in addition to the already too numerous warlike powers of the East, but of a religion which should finally develop into the most elevating and purifying influence among men, it is obvious that Ishmael was not at all a desirable heir. Whatever pain it gave to Abraham to part with him, separation in some form had become necessary. It was impossible that the father should continue to enjoy the filial affection of Ishmael, his lively talk, and warm enthusiasm, and adventurous exploits, and at the same time concentrate his hope and his care on Isaac. He had, therefore, to give up, with something of the sorrow and self-control he afterwards underwent in connection with the sacrifice of Isaac, the lad whose bright face had for so many years shone in all his paths. And in some such way are we often called to part with prospects

which have wrought themselves very deep into our spirit, and which, indeed, just because they are very promising and seductive, have become dangerous to us, upsetting the balance of our life, and throwing into the shade objects and purposes which ought to be outstanding. And when we are thus required to give up what we were looking to for comfort, for applause, and for profit, the voice of God in its first admonition sometimes seems to us little better than the jealousy of a woman. Like Sarah's demand, that none should share with her son, does the requirement seem which indicates to us that we must set nothing on a level with God's direct gifts to us. We refuse to see why we may not have all the pleasures and enjoyments, all the display and brilliance that the world can give. We feel as if we were needlessly restricted. But this instance shows us that when circumstances compel us to give up something of this kind which we have been cherishing, room is given for a better thing than itself to grow.

For Ishmael himself, too, wronged as he was in the mode of his expulsion, it was yet far better that he should go. Isaac *was* the true heir. No jeering allusions to his late birth or to his appearance could alter that fact. And to a temper like Ishmael's it was impossible to occupy a subordinate, dependent position. All he required to call out his latent powers was to be thrown thus on his own resources. The daring and high spirit and quickness to take offence and use violence, which would have wrought untold mischief in a pastoral camp, were the very qualities which found fit exercise in the desert, and seemed there only in keeping with the life he had to lead. And his hard experience at first would at his age do him no harm, but good only. To be compelled to face life single-

handed at the age of sixteen is by no means a fate to be pitied. It was the making of Ishmael, and is the making of many a lad in every generation.

But the two fugitives are soon reminded that, though expelled from Abraham's tents and protection, they are not expelled from his God. Ishmael finds it true that when father and mother forsake him, the Lord takes him up. At the very outset of his desert life he is made conscious that God is still his God, mindful of his wants, responsive to his cry of distress. It was not through Ishmael the promised seed was to come, but the descendants of Ishmael had every inducement to retain faith in the God of Abraham, who listened to their father's cry. The fact of being excluded from certain privileges did not involve that they were to be excluded from all privileges. God still "heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven."

It is this voice of God to Hagar that so speedily, and apparently once for all, lifts her out of despair to cheerful hope. It would appear as if her despair had been needless; at least from the words addressed to her, "What aileth thee, Hagar?" it would appear as if she might herself have found the water that was close at hand, if only she had been disposed to look for it. But she had lost heart, and perhaps with her despair was mingled some resentment, not only at Sarah, but at the whole Hebrew connection, including the God of the Hebrews, who had before encouraged her. Here was the end of the magnificent promise which that God had made her before her child was born—a helpless human form gasping its life away without a drop of water to moisten the parched tongue and bring light to the glazing eyes, and with no easier

couch than the burning sand. Was it for this, the bitterest drop that, apart from sin, can be given to any parent to drink, she had been brought from Egypt and led through all her past? Had her hopes been nursed by means so extraordinary only that they might be so bitterly blighted? Thus she leapt to her conclusions, and judged that because her skin of water had failed God had failed her too. No one can blame her, with her boy dying before her, and herself helpless to relieve one pang of his suffering. Hitherto in the well-furnished tents of Abraham she had been able to respond to his slightest desire. Thirst he had never known, save as the relish to some boyish adventure. But now, when his eyes appeal to her in dying anguish, she can but turn away in helpless despair. She cannot relieve his simplest want. Not for her own fate has she any tears, but to see her pride, her life and joy, perishing thus miserably, is more than she can bear.

No one can blame, but every one may learn from her. When angry resentment and unbelieving despair fill the mind, we may perish of thirst in the midst of springs. When God's promises produce no faith, but seem to us so much waste paper, we are necessarily in danger of missing their fulfilment. When we ascribe to God the harshness and wickedness of those who represent Him in the world, we commit moral suicide. So far from the promises given to Hagar being now at the point of extinction, this was the first considerable step towards their fulfilment. When Ishmael turned his back on the familiar tents, and flung his last gibe at Sarah, he was really setting out to a far richer inheritance, so far as this world goes, than ever fell to Isaac and his sons.

But the chief use Paul makes of this entire episode in the history is to see in it an allegory, a kind of picture made up of real persons and events, representing the impossibility of law and gospel living harmoniously together, the incompatibility of a spirit of service with a spirit of sonship. Hagar, he says, is in this picture the likeness of the law given from Sinai, which gendereth to bondage. Hagar and her son, that is to say, stand for the law and the kind of righteousness produced by the law,—not superficially a bad kind; on the contrary, a righteousness with much dash and brilliance and strong manly force about it, but at the root defective, faulty in its origin, springing from the slavish spirit. And first Paul bids us notice how the free-born is persecuted and mocked by the slave-born, that is, how the children of God who are trying to live by love and faith in Christ are put to shame and made uneasy by the law. They believe they are God's dear children, that they are loved by Him, and may go out and in freely in His house as their own home, using all that is His with the freedom of His heirs; but the law mocks them, frightens them, tells them *it* is God's first-born, law lying far back in the dimness of eternity, coeval with God Himself. It tells them they are puny and weak, scarcely out of their mother's arms, tottering, lisping creatures, doing much mischief, but none of the housework, at best only getting some little thing to pretend to work at. In contrast to their feeble, soft, unskilled weakness, it sets before them a finely-moulded, athletic form, becoming disciplined to all work, and able to take a place among the serviceable and able-bodied. But with all this there is in that puny babe a life begun which will grow and make it the true heir, dwelling in

the house and possessing what it has not toiled for, while the vigorous, likely-looking lad must go into the wilderness and make a possession for himself with his own bow and spear.

Now, of course, righteousness of life and character, or perfect manhood, is the end at which all that we call salvation aims, and that which can give us the purest, ripest character is salvation for us; that which can make us, for all purposes, most serviceable and strong. And when we are confronted with persons who might speak of service we cannot render, of an upright, unfaltering carriage we cannot assume, of a general human worthiness we can make no pretension to, we are justly perturbed, and should regain our equanimity only under the influence of the most undoubted truth and fact. If we can honestly say in our hearts, "Although we can show no such work done, and no such masculine growth, yet we have a life in us which is of God, and will grow;" if we are sure that we have the spirit of God's children, a spirit of love and dutifulness, we may take comfort from this incident. We may remind ourselves that it is not he who has at the present moment the best appearance who always abides in the father's home, but he who is by birth the heir. Have we or have we not the spirit of the Son? not feeling that we must every evening make good our claim to another night's lodging by showing the task we have accomplished, but being conscious that the interests in which we are called to work are our own interests, that we are heirs in the father's house, so that all we do for the house is really done for ourselves. Do we go out and in with God, feeling no need of His commands, our own eye seeing where help is required, and our own desires being

wholly directed towards that which engages all His attention and work?

For Paul would have each of us apply, allegorically, the words, Cast out the bondwoman and her son, that is, cast out the legal mode of earning a standing in God's house, and with this legal mode cast out all the self-seeking, the servile fear of God, the self-righteousness, and the hard-heartedness it engenders. Cast out wholly from yourself the spirit of the slave, and cherish the spirit of the son and heir. The slave-born may seem for a while to have a firm footing in the father's house, but it cannot last. The temper and tastes of Ishmael are radically different from those of Abraham, and when the slave-born becomes mature, the wild Egyptian strain will appear in his character. Moreover, he looks upon the goods of Abraham as plunder; he cannot rid himself of the feeling of an alien, and this would, at length, show itself in a want of frankness with Abraham—slowly, but surely, the confidence between them would be worn out. Nothing but being a child of God, being born of the Spirit, can give the feeling of intimacy, confidence, unity of interest, which constitutes true religion. All we do as slaves goes for nothing; that is to say, all we do, not because we see the good of it, but because we are commanded; not because we have any liking for the thing done, but because we wish to be paid for it. The day is coming when we shall attain our majority, when it will be said to us by God, Now, do whatever you like, whatever you have a mind to; no surveillance, no commands are now needed; I put all into your own hand. What, in these circumstances, should we straightway do? Should we, for the love of the thing, carry on the same work to which God's commands had driven us;

should we, if left absolutely in charge, find nothing more attractive than just to prosecute that idea of life and the world set before us by Christ? Or, should we see that we had merely been keeping ourselves in check for a while, biding our time, untamed as Ishmael, craving the rewards but not the life of the children of God? The most serious of all questions these—questions that determine the issues of our whole life, that determine whether our home is to be where all the best interests of men and the highest blessings of God have their seat, or in the pathless desert where life is an aimless wandering, dissociated from all the forward movements of men.

The distinction between the servile spirit and the spirit of sonship being thus radical, it could be by no mere formality, or exhibition of his legal title, that Isaac became the heir of God's heritage. His sacrifice on Moriah was the requisite condition of his succession to Abraham's place; it was the only suitable celebration of his majority. Abraham himself had been able to enter into covenant with God only by sacrifice; and sacrifice not of a dead and external kind, but vivified by an actual surrender of himself to God, and by so true a perception of God's holiness and requirements, that he was in a horror of great darkness. By no other process can any of his heirs succeed to the inheritance. A true resignation of self, in whatever outward form this resignation may appear, is required that we may become one with God in His holy purposes and in His eternal blessedness. There could be no doubt that Abraham had found a true heir, when Isaac laid himself on the altar and steadied his heart to receive the knife. Dearer to God, and of immeasurably greater value than any service, was this surrender of

himself into the hand of his Father and his God. In this was promise of all service and all loving fellowship. "Precious in the sight of tne Lord is the death of His saints. O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, the son of Thine handmaid: Thou hast loosed my bonds."

So incomparable with the most distinguished service did this sacrifice of Isaac's self appear, that the record of his active life seems to have had no interest to his contemporaries or successors. There was but this one thing to say of him. No more seemed needful. The sacrifice was indeed great, and worthy of commemoration. No act could so conclusively have shown that Isaac was thoroughly at one with God. He had much to live for; from his birth there hovered around him interests and hopes of the most exciting and flattering nature; a new kind of glory such as had not yet been attained on earth was to be attained, or, at any rate, approached in him. This glory was certain to be realised, being guaranteed by God's promise, so that his hopes might launch out in the boldest confidence and give him the aspect and bearing of a king; while it was uncertain in the time and manner of its realisation, so that the most attractive mystery hung around his future. Plainly his was a life worth entering on and living through; a life fit to engage and absorb a man's whole desire, interest, and effort; a life such as might well make a man gird himself and resolve to play the man throughout, that so each part of it might reveal its secret to him, and that none of its wonder might be lost. It was a life which, above all others, seemed worth protecting from all injury and risk, and for which, no doubt, not a few of the home-born servants in the patriarchal encampment would

have gladly ventured their own There have, indeed, been few, if any, lives of which it could so truly be said, The world cannot do without this—at all hazards and costs this must be cherished. And all this must have been even more obvious to its owner than to any one else, and must have begotten in him an unquestioning assurance, that he at least had a charmed life, and would live and see good days. Yet with whatever shock the command of God came upon him, there is no word of doubt or remonstrance or rebellion. He gave his life to Him who had first given it to him. And thus yielding himself to God, he entered into the inheritance, and became worthy to stand to all time the representative heir of God, as Abraham by his faith had become the father of the faithful.

XVIII.

PURCHASE OF MACHPELAH.

GENESIS xxiii.

IT may be supposed to be a needless observation that our life is greatly influenced by thef act that it speedily and certainly ends in death. But it might be interesting, and it would certainly be surprising, to trace out the various ways in which this fact influences life. Plainly every human affair would be altered if we lived on here for ever, supposing that were possible. What the world would be had we no predecessors, no wisdom but what our own past experience and the genius of one generation of men could produce, we can scarcely imagine. We can scarcely imagine what life would be or what the world would be did not one generation succeed and oust another and were we contemporary with the whole process of history. It is the grand irreversible and universal law that we give place and make room for others. The individual passes away, but the history of the race proceeds. Here on earth in the meantime, and not elsewhere, the history of the race is being played out, and each having done his part, however small or however great, passes away. Whether an individual, even the most gifted and powerful, could continue to be helpful to the race for thousands of years, supposing his life were continued, it is

needless to inquire. Perhaps as steam has force only at a certain pressure, so human force requires the condensation of a brief life to give it elastic energy. But these are idle speculations. They show us, however, that our life beyond death will be not so much a prolongation of life as we now know it as an entire change in the form of our existence; and they show us also that our little piece of the world's work must be quickly done if it is to be done at all, and that it will not be done at all unless we take our life seriously and own the responsibilities we have to ourselves, to our fellows, to our God.

Death comes sadly to the survivor, even when there is as little untimeliness as in the case of Sarah; and as Abraham moved towards the familiar tent the most intimate of his household would stand aloof and respect his grief. The stillness that struck upon him, instead of the usual greeting, as he lifted the tent-door; the dead order of all inside; the one object that lay stark before him and drew him again and again to look on what grieved him most to see; the chill which ran through him as his lips touched the cold, stony forehead and gave him sensible evidence how gone was the spirit from the clay—these are shocks to the human heart not peculiar to Abraham. But few have been so strangely bound together as these two were, or have been so manifestly given to one another by God, or have been forced to so close a mutual dependence. Not only had they grown up in the same family, and been together separated from their kindred, and passed through unusual and difficult circumstances together, but they were made co-heirs of God's promise in such a manner that neither could enjoy it without the other. They were knit together, not merely by natural liking and

familiarity of intercourse, but by God's choosing them as the instrument of His work and the fountain of His salvation. So that in Sarah's death Abraham doubtless read an intimation that his own work was done, and that his generation is now out of date and ready to be supplanted.

Abraham's grief is interrupted by the sad but wholesome necessity which forces us from the blank desolation of watching by the dead to the active duties that follow. She whose beauty had captivated two princes must now be buried out of sight. So Abraham stands up from before his dead. Such a moment requires the resolute fortitude and manly self-control which that expression seems intended to suggest. There is something within us which rebels against the ordinary ongoing of the world side by side with our great woe; we feel as if either the whole world must mourn with us, or we must go aside from the world and have our grief out in private. The bustle of life seems so meaningless and incongruous to one whom grief has emptied of all relish for it. We seem to wrong the dead by every return of interest we show in the things of life which no longer interest *him*. Yet he speaks truly who says:—

> "When sorrow all our heart would ask,
> We need not shun our daily task,
> And hide ourselves for calm;
> The herbs we seek to heal our woe,
> Familiar by our pathway grow,
> Our common air is balm."

We must resume our duties, not as if nothing had happened, not proudly forgetting death and putting grief aside as if this life did not need the chastening influence of such realities as we have been engaged

with, or as if its business could not be pursued in an affectionate and softened spirit, but acknowledging death as real and as humbling and sobering.

Abraham then goes forth to seek a grave for Sarah, having already with a common predilection fixed on the spot where he himself would prefer to be laid. He goes accordingly to the usual meeting-place or exchange of these times, the city-gate, where bargains were made, and where witnesses for their ratification could always be had. Men who are familiar with Eastern customs rather spoil for us the scene described in this chapter by assuring us that all these courtesies and large offers are merely the ordinary forms preliminary to a bargain, and were as little meant to be literally understood as we mean to be literally understood when we sign ourselves "your most obedient servant." Abraham asks the Hittite chiefs to approach Ephron on the subject, because all bargains of the kind are negotiated through mediators. Ephron's offer of the cave and field is merely a form. Abraham quite understood that Ephron only indicated his willingness to deal, and so he urges him to state his price, which Ephron is not slow to do; and apparently his price was a handsome one such as he could not have asked from a poorer man, for he adds, "What are four hundred shekels between wealthy men like you and me? Without more words let the bargain be closed—bury thy dead."

The first landed property, then, of the patriarchs is a grave. In this tomb were laid Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca; here, too, Jacob buried Leah, and here Jacob himself desired to be laid after his death, his last words being, "Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite." This grave, therefore, becomes the centre of the land.

Where the dust of our fathers is, there is our country; and as you may often hear aged persons, who are content to die and have little else to pray for, still express a wish that they may rest in the old well-remembered churchyard where their kindred lie, and may thus in the weakness of death find some comfort, and in its solitariness some companionship from the presence of those who tenderly sheltered the helplessness of their childhood; so does this place of the dead become henceforth the centre of attraction for all Abraham's seed to which still from Egypt their longings and hopes turn, as to the one magnetic point which, having once been fixed there, binds them ever to the land. It is this grave which binds them to the land. This laying of Sarah in the tomb is the real occupation of the land.

During the lapse of ages, all around this spot has been changed again and again; but at some remote period, possibly as early as the time of David, the reverence of the Jews built these tombs round with masonry so substantial that it still endures. Within the space thus enclosed there stood for long a Christian church, but since the Mohammedan domination was established, a mosque has covered the spot. This mosque has been guarded against Christian intrusion with a jealousy almost as rigid as that which excludes all unbelievers from approaching Mecca. And though the Prince of Wales was a few years ago allowed to enter the mosque, he was not permitted to make any examination of the vaults beneath, where the original tomb must be.

It is evident that this narrative of the purchase of Machpelah and the burial of Sarah was preserved, not so much on account of the personal interest which Abraham had in these matters, as on account of the manifest

significance they had in connection with the history of his faith. He had recently heard from his own kindred in Mesopotamia, and it might very naturally have occurred to him that the proper place to bury Sarah was in his fatherland. The desire to lie among one's people is a very strong Eastern sentiment. Even tribes which have no dislike to emigration make provision that at death their bodies shall be restored to their own country. The Chinese notoriously do so. Abraham, therefore, could hardly have expressed his faith in a stronger form than by purchasing a burying-ground for himself in Canaan. It was equivalent to saying in the most emphatic form that he believed this country would remain in perpetuity the country of his children and people. He had as yet given no such pledge as this was, that he had irrevocably abandoned his fatherland. He had bought no other landed property; he had built no house. He shifted his encampment from place to place as convenience dictated, and there was nothing to hinder him from returning at any time to his old country. But now he fixed himself down; he said, as plainly as acts can say, that his mind was made up that this was to be in all time coming his land; this was no mere right of pasture rented for the season, no mere waste land he might occupy with his tents till its owner wished to reclaim it; it was no estate he could put into the market whenever trade should become dull and he might wish to realise or to leave the country; but it was a kind of property which he could not sell and could not abandon.

Again, his determination to hold it in perpetuity is evident not only from the nature of the property, but also from the formal purchase and conveyance of it—the complete and precise terms in which the transaction is

completed. The narrative is careful to remind us again and again that the whole transaction was negotiated in the audience of the people of the land, of all those who went in at the gate, that the sale was thoroughly approved and witnessed by competent authorities. The precise subjects made over to Abraham are also detailed with all the accuracy of a legal document—"the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city." Abraham had no doubt of the friendliness of such men as Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, his ancient allies, but he was also aware that the best way to maintain friendly relations was to leave no loophole by which difference of opinion or disagreement might enter. Let the thing be in black and white, so that there may be no misunderstanding as to terms, no expectations doomed to be unfulfilled, no encroachments which must cause resentment, if not retaliation. Law probably does more to prevent quarrels than to heal them. As statesmen and historians tell us that the best way to secure peace is to be prepared for war, so legal documents seem no doubt harsh and unfriendly, but really are more effective in maintaining peace and friendliness than vague promises and benevolent intentions. In arranging affairs and engagements one is always tempted to say, Never mind about the money, see how the thing turns out and we can settle that by-and-bye; or, in looking at a will, one is tempted to ask, of what strength is Christian feeling—not to say family affection—if all these hard-and-fast lines need to be drawn round the little bit of

property which each is to have? But experience shows that this is false delicacy, and that kindliness and charity may be as fully and far more safely expressed in definite and legal terms than in loose promises or mere understandings.

Again, Abraham's idea in purchasing this sepulchre is brought out by the circumstance that he would not accept the offer of the children of Heth to use one of their sepulchres. This was not pride of blood or any feeling of that sort, but the right feeling that what God had promised as His own peculiar gift must not seem to be given by men. Possibly no great harm might have come of it if Abraham had accepted the gift of a mere cave, or a shelf in some other man's burying-ground; but Abraham could not bear to think that any captious person should ever be able to say that the inheritance promised by God was really the gift of a Hittite.

Similar captiousness appears not only in the experience of the individual Christian, but also in the treatment religion gets from the world. It is quite apparent, that is to say, that the world counts itself the real proprietor here, and Christianity a stranger fortunately or unfortunately thrown upon its shores and upon *its mercy*. One cannot miss noticing the patronising way of the world towards the Church and all that is connected with it, as if it alone could give it those things needful for its prosperity—and especially willing is it to come forward in the Hittite fashion and offer to the sojourner a sepulchre where it may be decently buried, and as a dead thing lie out of the way.

But thoughts of a still wider reach were no doubt suggested to Abraham by this purchase. Often must

he have brooded on the sacrifice of Isaac, seeking to exhaust its meaning. Many a talk in the dusk must his son and he have had about that most strange experience. And no doubt the one thing that seemed always certain about it was, that it is through death a man truly becomes the heir of God; and here again in this purchase of a tomb for Sarah it is the same fact that stares him in the face. He becomes a proprietor when death enters his family; he himself, he feels, is likely to have no more than this burial-acre of possession of his land; it is only by dying he enters on actual possession. Till then he is but a tenant, not a proprietor; as he says to the children of Heth, he is but a stranger and a sojourner among them, but at death he will take up his permanent dwelling in their midst. Was this not to suggest to him that there might be a deeper meaning underlying this, and that possibly it was only by death he could enter fully into all that God intended he should receive? No doubt in the first instance it was a severe trial to his faith to find that even at his wife's death he had acquired no firmer foothold in the land. No doubt it was the very triumph of his faith that though he himself had never had a settled, permanent residence in the land, but had dwelt in tents, moving about from place to place, just as he had done the first year of his entrance upon it, yet he died in the unalterable persuasion that the land was his, and that it would one day be filled with his descendants. It was the triumph of his faith that he believed in the performance of the promise as he had originally understood it; that he believed in the gift of the actual visible land. But it is difficult to believe that he did not come to the persuasion that God's friendship was more than any single thing He promised;

difficult to suppose he did not feel something of what our Lord expressed in the words that God is the God of the living, not of the dead; that those who are His enter by death into some deeper and richer experience of His love.

Such is the interpretation put upon Abraham's attitude of mind by the writer, who of all others saw most deeply into the moving principles of the Old Testament dispensation and the connection between old things and new—I mean the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He says that persons who act as Abraham did declare plainly that they seek a country; and if on finding they did not get the country in which they sojourned they thought the promise had failed, they might, he says, have found opportunity to return to the country whence they came at first. And why did they not do so? Because they sought a better, that is, an heavenly country. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city; as if He said, God would have been ashamed of Abraham if he had been content with less, and had not aspired to something more than he received in the land of Canaan.

Now how else could Abraham's mind have been so effectually lifted to this exalted hope as by the disappointment of his original and much tamer hope? Had he gained possession of the land in the ordinary way of purchase or conquest, and had he been able to make full use of it for the purposes of life; had he acquired meadows where his cattle might graze, towns where his followers might establish themselves, would he not almost certainly have fallen into the belief that in these pastures and by his worldly wealth and quiet and prosperity he was already exhausting God's promise

regarding the land? But buying the land for his dead he is forced to enter upon it from the right side, with the idea that not by present enjoyment of its fertility is God's promise to him exhausted. Both in the getting of his heir and in the acquisition of his land his mind is led to contemplate things beyond the range of earthly vision and earthly success. He is led to the thought that God having become his God, this means blessing eternal as God Himself. In short Abraham came to believe in a life beyond the grave on very much the same grounds as many people still rely on. They feel that this life has an unaccountable poverty and meagreness in it. They feel that they themselves are much larger than the life here allotted to them. They are out of proportion. It may be said that this is their own fault; they should make life a larger, richer thing. But that is only apparently true; the very brevity of life, which no skill of theirs can alter, is itself a limiting and disappointing condition. Moreover, it seems unworthy of God as well as of man. As soon as a worthy conception of God possesses the soul, the idea of immortality forthwith follows it. We instinctively feel that God can do far more for us than is done in this life. Our knowledge of Him here is most rudimentary; our connection with Him obscure and perplexed, and wanting in fulness of result; we seem scarcely to know whose we are, and scarcely to be reconciled to the essential conditions of life, or even to God;—we are, in short, in a very different kind of life from that which we can conceive and desire. Besides, a serious belief in God, in a personal Spirit, removes at a touch all difficulties arising from materialism. If God lives and yet has no senses or bodily appearance, we also may so live; and if His is the higher state

and the more enjoyable state, we need not dread to experience life as disembodied spirits.

It is certainly a most acceptable lesson that is read to us here—viz., that God's promises do not shrivel, but grow solid and expand as we grasp them. Abraham went out to enter on possession of a few fields a little richer than his own, and he found an eternal inheritance. Naturally we think quite the opposite of God's promises; we fancy they are grandiloquent and magnify things, and that the actual fulfilment will prove unworthy of the language describing it. But as the woman who came to touch the hem of Christ's garment with some dubious hope that thus her body might be healed, found herself thereby linked to Christ for evermore, so always, if we meet God at any one point and honestly trust Him for even the smallest gift, He makes that the means of introducing Himself to us and getting us to understand the value of His better gifts. And indeed, if this life were all, might not God well be ashamed to call Himself our God? When He calls Himself our God He bids us expect to find in Him inexhaustible resources to protect and satisfy and enrich us. He bids us cherish boldly all innocent and natural desires, believing that we have in Him one who can gratify every such desire. But if this life be all, who can say existence has been perfectly satisfactory—if there be no reversal of what has here gone wrong, no restoration of what has here been lost, if there be no life in which conscience and ideas and hopes find their fulfilment and satisfaction, who can say he is content and could ask no more of God? Who can say he does not see what more God could do for him than has here been done? Doubtless there are many happy lives, doubtless there are lives which carry in them a

worthiness and a sacredness which manifest God's presence, but even such lives only more powerfully suggest a state in which all lives shall be holy and happy, and in which, freed from inward uneasiness and shame and sorrow, we shall live unimpeded the highest life, life as we feel it ought to be. The very joys men have here experienced suggest to them the desirableness of continued life; the love they have known can only intensify their yearning for this perpetual enjoyment; their whole experience of this life has served to reveal to them the endless possibilities of growth and of activity that are bound up in human nature; and if death is to end all this, what more has life been to any of us than a seed-time without a harvest, an education without any sphere of employment, a vision of good that can never be ours, a striving after the unattainable? If this is all that God can give us we must indeed be disappointed in Him.

But He is disappointed in us if we do not aspire to more than this. In this sense also He is ashamed to be called our God. He is ashamed to be known as the God of men who never aspire to higher blessings than earthly comfort and present prosperity. He is ashamed to be known as connected with those who think so lightly of His power that they look for nothing beyond what every man calculates on getting in this world. God means all present blessings and all blessings of a lower kind to lure us on to trust Him and seek more and more from Him. In these early promises of His He says nothing expressly and distinctly of things eternal. He appeals to the immediate wants and present longings of men—just as our Lord while on earth drew men to Himself by healing their diseases.

Take, then, any one promise of God, and, however small it seems at first, it will grow in your hand; you will find always that you get more than you bargained for, that you cannot take even a little without going further and receiving all.

XIX.

ISAAC'S MARRIAGE.

GENESIS xxiv.

"Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."—PROV. xxxi. 30.

"WHEN a son has attained the age of twenty years, his father, if able, should marry him, and then take his hand and say, I have disciplined thee, and taught thee, and married thee; I now seek refuge with God from thy mischief in the present world and the next." This Mohammedan tradition expresses with tolerable accuracy the idea of the Eastern world, that a father has not discharged his responsibilities towards his son until he finds a wife for him. Abraham no doubt fully recognised his duty in this respect, but he had allowed Isaac to pass the usual age. He was thirty-seven at his mother's death, forty when the events of this chapter occurred. This delay was occasioned by two causes. The bond between Isaac and his mother was an unusually strong one; and alongside of that imperious woman a young wife would have found it even more difficult than usual to take a becoming place. Besides, where was a wife to be found? No doubt some of Abraham's Hittite friends would have considered any daughter of theirs exceptionally fortunate who should secure so good an alliance. The

heir of Abraham was no inconsiderable person even when measured by Hittite expectations. And it may have taxed Abraham's sagacity to find excuses for not forming an alliance which seemed so natural, and which would have secured to him and his heirs a settled place in the country. This was so obvious, common, easily accomplished a means of gaining a footing for Isaac among somewhat dangerous neighbours, that it stands to reason Abraham must often have weighed its advantages.

But as often as he weighed the advantages of this solution of his difficulty, so often did he reject them. He was resolved that the race should be of pure Hebrew blood. His own experience in connection with Hagar had given this idea a settled prominence in his mind. And, accordingly, in his instructions to the servant whom he sent to find a wife for Isaac, two things were insisted on—1st, that she should not be a Canaanite; and, 2nd, that on no pretext should Isaac be allowed to leave the land of promise and visit Mesopotamia. The steward, knowing something of men and women, foresaw that it was most unlikely that a young woman would forsake her own land and preconceived hopes and go away with a stranger to a foreign country. Abraham believes she will be persuaded. But in any case, he says, one thing must be seen to; Isaac must on no account be induced to leave the promised land even to visit Mesopotamia. God will furnish Isaac with a wife without putting him into circumstances of great temptation, without requiring him to go into societies in the slightest degree injurious to his faith. In fact, Abraham refused to do what countless Christian mothers of marriageable sons and daughters do without compunction. He had an insight into the real influences

that form action and determine careers which many of us sadly lack.

And his faith was rewarded. The tidings from his brother's family arrived in the nick of time. Light, he found, was sown for the upright. It happened with him as it has doubtless often happened with ourselves, that though we have been looking forward to a certain time with much anxiety, unable even to form a plan of action, yet when the time actually came, things seemed to arrange themselves, and the thing to do became quite obvious. Abraham was persuaded God would send His angel to bring the affair to a happy issue. And when we seem drifting towards some great upturning of our life, or when things seem to come all of a sudden and in crowds upon us, so that we cannot judge what we should do, it is an animating thought that another eye than ours is penetrating the darkness, finding for us a way through all entanglement and making crooked things straight for us.

But the patience of Isaac was quite as remarkable as the faith of Abraham. He was now forty years old, and if, as he had been told, the great aim of his life, the great service he was to render to the world, was bound up with the rearing of a family, he might with some reason be wondering why circumstances were so adverse to the fulfilment of this vocation. Must he not have been tempted, as his father had been, to take matters into his own hand? Fathers are perhaps too scrupulous about telling their sons instructive passages from their own experience; but when Abraham saw Isaac exercised and discomposed about this matter, he can scarcely have failed to strengthen his spirit by telling him something of his own mistakes in life. Abraham must have seen that everything depended on Isaac's

conduct, and that he had a very difficult part to play. He himself had been supernaturally encouraged to leave his own land and sojourn in Canaan; on the other hand, by the time Jacob grew up, the idea of the promised land had become traditional and fixed; though even Jacob, had he found Laban a better master, might have permanently renounced his expectations in Canaan. But Isaac enjoyed the advantages neither of the first nor of the third generation. The coming into Canaan was not his doing, and he saw how little of the land Abraham had gained. He was under strong temptation to disbelieve. And when he measured his condition with that of other young men, he certainly required unusual self-control. And to every one who would urge, Youth is passing, and I am not getting what I expected at God's hand; I have not received that providential leading I was led to expect, nor do I find that my life is made simpler; it is very well to tell me to wait, but life is slipping away, and we may wait too long—to every one whose heart urges such murmurs, Abraham through Isaac would say: But if you wait for God you get something, some positive good, and not some mere appearance of good; you at last do get begun, you get into life at the right door; whereas if you follow some other way than that which you believe God wishes to lead you in, you get nothing.

Isaac's continence had its reward. In the suitableness of Rebekah to a man of his nature, we see the suitableness of all such gifts of God as are really waited for at His hand. God may keep us longer waiting than the world does, but He gives us never the wrong thing. Isaac had no idea of Rebekah's character; he could only yield himself to God's knowledge of what he needed; and so there came to him,

from a country he had never seen, a help-meet singularly adapted to his own character. One cannot read of her lively, bustling, almost forward, but obliging and generous conduct at the well, nor of her prompt, impulsive departure to an unknown land, without seeing, as no doubt Eliezer very quickly saw, that this was exactly the woman for Isaac. In this eager, ardent, active, enterprising spirit, his own retiring and contemplative, if not sombre disposition found its appropriate relief and stimulus. Hers was a spirit which might indeed, with so mild a lord, take more of the management of affairs than was befitting; and when the wear and tear of life had tamed down the girlish vivacity with which she spoke to Eliezer at the well, and leapt from the camel to meet her lord, her active-mindedness does appear in the disagreeable shape of the clever scheming of the mother of a family. In her sons you see her qualities exaggerated: from her, Esau derived his activity and open-handedness; and in Jacob, you find that her self-reliant and unscrupulous management has become a self-asserting craft which leads him into much trouble, if it also sometimes gets him out of difficulties. But such as Rebekah was, she was quite the woman to attract Isaac and supplement his character.

So in other cases where you find you must leave yourself very much in God's hand, what He sends you will be found more precisely adapted to your character than if you chose it for yourself. You find your whole nature has been considered,—your aims, your hopes, your wants, your position, whatever in you waits for something unattained. And as in giving to Isaac the intended mother of the promised seed, God gave him a woman who fitted in to all the peculiarities

of his nature, and was a comfort and a joy to him in his own life; so we shall always find that God, in satisfying His own requirements, satisfies at the same time our wants—that God carries forward His work in the world by the satisfaction of the best and happiest feelings of our nature, so that it is not only the result that is blessedness, but blessing is created along its whole course.

Abraham's servant, though not very sanguine of success, does all in his power to earn it. He sets out with an equipment fitted to inspire respect and confidence. But as he draws nearer and nearer to the city of Nahor, revolving the delicate nature of his errand, and feeling that definite action must now be taken, he sees so much room for making an irreparable mistake that he resolves to share his responsibility with the God of his master. And the manner in which he avails himself of God's guidance is remarkable. He does not ask God to guide him to the house of Bethuel; indeed, there was no occasion to do so, for any child could have pointed out the house to him. But he was a cautious person, and he wished to make his own observations on the appearance and conduct of the younger women of the household, before in any way committing himself to them. He was free to make these observations at the well; while he felt it must be very awkward to enter Laban's house with the possibility of leaving it dissatisfied. At the same time, he felt it was for God rather than for him to choose a wife for Isaac. So he made an arrangement by which the interposition of God was provided for. He meant to make his own selection, guided necessarily by the comparative attractiveness of the women who came for water, possibly also by some family likeness

to Sarah or Isaac he might expect to see in any women of Bethuel's house; but knowing the deceitfulness of appearances, he asked God to confirm and determine his own choice by moving the girl he should address to give him a certain answer. Having arranged this, "Behold! Rebekah came out with her pitcher upon her shoulder, and the damsel was very fair to look upon." In the Bible the beauty of women is frankly spoken of without prudery or mawkishness as an influence in human affairs. The beauty of Rebekah at once disposed Eliezer to address her, and his first impression in her favour was confirmed by the obliging, cheerful alacrity with which she did very much more than she was asked, and, indeed, took upon herself, through her kindness of disposition, a task of some trouble and fatigue.

It is important to observe then in what sense and to what extent this capable servant asked a sign. He did not ask for a bare, intrinsically insignificant sign. He might have done so. He might have proposed as a test, Let her who stumbles on the first step of the well be the designed wife of Isaac; or, Let her who comes with a certain-coloured flower in her hand—or so forth. But the sign he chose was significant, because dependent on the character of the girl herself; a sign which must reveal her good-heartedness and readiness to oblige and courteous activity in the entertainment of strangers—in fact, the outstanding Eastern virtue. So that he really acted very much as Isaac himself must have done. He would make no approach to any one whose appearance repelled him; and when satisfied in this particular, he would test her disposition. And of course it was these qualities of Rebekah which afterwards caused Isaac to feel that this was the wife

God had designed for him. It was not by any arbitrary sign that he or any man could come to know who was the suitable wife for him, but only by the love she aroused within him. God has given this feeling to direct choice in marriage; and where this is wanting, nothing else whatever, no matter how astoundingly providential it seems, ought to persuade a man that such and such a person is designed to be his wife.

There are turning points in life at once so momentous in their consequence, and affording so little material for choice, that one is much tempted to ask for more than providential leading. Not only among savages and heathen have omens been sought. Among Christians there has been manifest a constant disposition to appeal to the lot, or to accept some arbitrary way of determining which course we should follow. In very many predicaments we should be greatly relieved were there some one who could at once deliver us from all hesitation and mental conflict by one authoritative word. There are, perhaps, few things more frequently and determinedly wished for, nor regarding which we are so much tempted to feel that such a thing should be, as some infallible guide before whom we could lay every difficulty; who would tell us at once what ought to be done in each case, and whether we ought to continue as we are or make some change. But only consider for a moment what would be the consequence of having such a guide. At every important step of your progress you would, of course, instantly turn to him; as soon as doubt entered your mind regarding the moral quality of an action, or the propriety of a course you think of adopting, you would be at your counsellor. And what would be the consequence? The consequence would be, that instead of the various circumstances,

experiences, and temptations of this life being a training to you, your conscience would every day become less able to guide you, and your will less able to decide, until, instead of being a mature son of God, who has learned to conform his conscience and will to the will of God, you would be quite imbecile as a moral creature. What God desires by our training here is, that we become like to Him; that there be nurtured in us a power to discern between good and evil; that by giving our own voluntary consent to His appointments, and that by discovering in various and perplexing circumstances what is the right thing to do, we may have our own moral natures as enlightened, strengthened, and fully developed every way as possible. The object of God in declaring His will to us is not to point out particular steps, but to bring our wills into conformity with His, so that whether we err in any particular step or no, we shall still be near to Him in intention. He does with us as we with children. We do not always at once relieve them from their little difficulties, but watch with interest the working of their own conscience regarding the matter, and will give them no sign till they themselves have decided.

Evidently, therefore, before we may dare to ask a sign from God, the case must be a very special one. If you are at present engaged in something that is to your own conscience doubtful, and if you are not hiding this from God, but would very willingly, so far as you know your own mind, do in the matter what He pleases —if no further light is coming to you, and you feel a growing inclination to put it to God in this way: "Grant, O Lord, that something may happen by which I may know Thy mind in this matter"—this is asking from God a kind of help which He is very ready to

give, often leading men to clearer views of duty by events which happen within their knowledge, and which having no special significance to persons whose minds are differently occupied, are yet most instructive to those who are waiting for light on some particular point. The danger is not here, but in fixing God down to the special thing which shall happen as a sign between Him and you; which, when it happens, gives no fresh light on the subject, leaves your mind still *morally* undecided, but only binds you, by an arbitrary bargain of your own, to follow one course rather than another. This matter that you would so summarily dispose of may be the very thread of your life which God means to test you by; this state of indecision which you would evade, God may mean to continue until your moral character grows strong enough to rise above it to the right decision.

No one will suppose that Rebekah's readiness to leave her home was due to mere light-mindedness. Her motives were no doubt mixed. The worldly position offered to her was good, and there was an attractive spice of romance about the whole affair which would have its charm. She may also be credited with some apprehension of the great future of Isaac's family. In after life she certainly showed a very keen sense of the value of the blessings peculiar to that household. And, probably above all, she had an irresistible feeling that this was her destiny. She saw the hand of God in her selection, and with a more or less conscious faith in God she passed to her new life.

Her first meeting with her future husband is not the least picturesque passage in this most picturesque narrative. Isaac had gone out on that side of the encampment by which he knew his father's messenger was

most likely to approach. He had gone out "to meditate at even-tide;" his meditation being necessarily directed and intensified by his attitude of critical expectancy.

The evening light, in our country hanging dubiously between the glare of noon and the darkness of midnight, invites to that condition of mind which lies between the intense alertness of day and the deep oblivion of sleep, and which seems the most favourable for the meditation of divine things. The dusk of evening seems interposed between day and night to invite us to that reflection which should intervene betwixt our labour and our rest from labour, that we may leave our work behind us satisfied that we have done what we could, or, seeing its faultiness, may still lay us down to sleep with God's forgiveness. It is when the bright sunlight has gone, and no more reproaches our inactivity, that friends can enjoy prolonged intercourse, and can best unbosom to one another, as if the darkness gave opportunity for a tenderness which would be ashamed to show itself during the twelve hours in which a man shall work. And all that makes this hour so beloved by the family circle, and so conducive to friendly intercourse, makes it suitable also for such intercourse with God as each human soul can attempt. Most of us suppose we have some little plot of time railed off for God morning and evening, but how often does it get trodden down by the profane multitude of this world's cares, and quite occupied by encroaching secular engagements. But evening is the time when many men are, and when all men ought to be least hurried; when the mind is placid, but not yet prostrate; when the body requires rest from its ordinary labour, but is not yet so oppressed with fatigue as to make devotion a mockery; when the din of this world's business

is silenced, and as a sleeper wakes to consciousness when some accustomed noise is checked, so the soul now wakes up to the thought of itself and of God. I know not whether those of us who have the opportunity have also the resolution to sequester ourselves evening by evening, as Isaac did; but this I do know, that he who does so will not fail of his reward, but will very speedily find that his Father who seeth in secret is manifestly rewarding him. What we all need above all things is to let the mind *dwell* on divine things—to be able to sit down knowing we have so much clear time in which we shall not be disturbed, and during which we shall think directly under God's eye—to get quite rid of the feeling of getting through with something, so that without distraction the soul may take a deliberate survey of its own matters. And so shall often God's gifts appear on our horizon when we lift up our eyes, as Isaac "lifted up his eyes and saw the camels coming" with his bride.

Twilight, "nature's vesper-bell," or the light shaded at evening by the hills of Palestine, seems, then, to have called Isaac to a familiar occupation. This long-continued mourning for his mother, and his lonely meditation in the fields, are both in harmony with what we know of his character, and of his experience on Mount Moriah. Retiring and contemplative, willing to conciliate by concession rather than to assert and maintain his rights against opposition, glad to yield his own affairs to the strong guidance of some other hand, tender and deep in his affections, to him this lonely meditation seems singularly appropriate. His dwelling, too, was remote, on the edge of the wilderness, by the well which Hagar had named Lahai-roi. Here he dwelt as one consecrated to God, feeling little desire to

enter deeper into the world, and preferring the place where the presence of God was least disturbed by the society of men. But at this time he had come from the south, and was awaiting at his father's encampment the result of Eliezer's mission. And one can conceive the thrill of keen expectancy that shot through him as he saw the female figure alighting from the camel, the first eager exchange of greetings, and the gladness with which he brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent and was comforted after his mother's death. The readiness with which he loved her seems to be referred in the narrative to the grief he still felt for his mother; for as a candle is never so easily lit as just after it has been put out, so the affection of Isaac, still emitting the sad memorial of a past love, more quickly caught at the new object presented. And thus was consummated a marriage which shows us how thoroughly interwrought are the plans of God and the life of man, each fulfilling the other.

For as the salvation God introduces into the world is a practical, every-day salvation to deliver us from the sins which this life tempts us to, so God introduced this salvation by means of the natural affections and ordinary arrangements of human life. God would have us recognise in our lives what He shows us in this chapter, that He has made provision for our wants, and that if we wait upon Him He will bring us into the enjoyment of all we really need. So that if we are to make any advance in appropriating to ourselves God's salvation, it can only be by submitting ourselves implicitly to His providence, and taking care that in the commonest and most secular actions of our lives we are having respect to His will with us, and that in those actions in which our own feelings and desires

seem sufficient to guide us, we are having regard to His controlling wisdom and goodness. We are to find room for God everywhere in our lives, not feeling embarrassed by the thought of His claims even in our least constrained hours, but subordinating to His highest and holiest ends everything that our life contains, and acknowledging as His gift what may seem to be our own most proper conquest or earning.

XII.

ESAU AND JACOB.

GENESIS XXV.

"He goeth as an ox goeth to the slaughter, till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."—PROV. vii. 22, 23.

THE character and career of Isaac would seem to tell us that it is possible to have too great a father. Isaac was dwarfed and weakened by growing up under the shadow of Abraham. Of his life there was little to record, and what was recorded was very much a reproduction of some of the least glorious passages of his father's career. The digging of wells for his flocks was among the most notable events in his commonplace life, and even in this he only re-opened the wells his father had dug.

In him we see the result of growing up under too strong and dominant an external influence. The free and healthy play of his own capacities and will was curbed. The sons of outstanding fathers are much tempted to follow in the wake of *their* success, and be too much controlled and limited by the example therein set to them. There is a great deal to induce a son to do so; this calling has been successful in his father's case, what better can he do than follow? Also he may get the use of his *wells*—those sources his father has

opened for the easier or more abundant maintenance of those dependent on him, the business he has established, the practice he has made, the connections he has formed—these are useful if he follows in his father's line of life. But all this tends, as in Isaac's case, to the stunting of the man himself. Life is made too easy for him.

Isaac has been called "the Wordsworth of the Old Testament," but his meditative disposition seems to have degenerated into mere dreamy apathy, which, at last, made him the tool of the more active-minded members of his family, and was also attended by its common accompaniment of sensuality. It seems also to have brought him to a condition of almost entire bodily prostration, for a comparison of dates shows that he must have spent forty or fifty years in blindness and incapacity for all active duty. Neither can this greatly surprise us, for it is abundantly open to our own observation that men of the finest spiritual discernment, and of whose godliness in the main one cannot doubt, are also frequently the prey of the most childish tastes, and most useless even to the extent of doing harm in practical matters. They do not see the evil that is growing in their own family; or, if they see it, they cannot rouse themselves to check it.

Isaac's marriage, though so promising in the outset, brought new trial into his life. Rebekah had to repeat the experience of Sarah. The intended mother of the promised seed was left for twenty years childless—to contend with the doubts, surmises, evil proposals, proud challengings of God, and murmurings, which must undoubtedly have arisen even in so bright and spirited a heart as Rebekah's. It was thus she was taught the seriousness of the position she had chosen

for herself, and gradually led to the implicit faith requisite for the discharge of its responsibilities. Many young persons have a similar experience. They seem to themselves to have chosen a wrong position, to have made a thorough mistake in life, and to have brought themselves into circumstances in which they only retard, or quite prevent, the prosperity of those with whom they are connected. In proportion as Rebekah loved Isaac, and entered into his prospects, must she have been tempted to think she had far better have remained in Padan-aram. It *is* a humbling thing to stand in some other person's way; but if it is by no fault of ours, but in obedience to affection or conscience we are in this position, we must, in humility and patience, wait upon Providence as Rebekah did, and resist all morbid despondency.

This second barrenness in the prospective mother of the promised seed was as needful to all concerned as the first was; for the people of God, no more than any others, can learn in one lesson. They must again be brought to a real dependence on God as the Giver of the heir. The prayer with which Isaac "entreated" the Lord for his wife "because she was barren" was a prayer of deeper intensity than he could have uttered had he merely remembered the story that had been told him of his own birth. God must be recognised again and again and throughout as the Giver of life to the promised line. We are all apt to suppose that when once we have got a thing in train and working we can get on without God. How often do we pray for the bestowal of a blessing, and forget to pray for its continuance? How often do we count it enough that God has conferred some gift, and, not inviting Him to continue His agency, but trusting to ourselves,

we mar His gift in the use? Learn, therefore, that although God has given you means of working out His salvation, your Rebekah will be barren without His continued activity. On His own means you must re-invite His blessing, for without the continuance of His aid you will make nothing of the most beautiful and appropriate helps He has given you.

It was by pain, anxiety, and almost dismay, that Rebekah received intimation that her prayer was answered. In this she is the type of many whom God hears. Inward strife, miserable forebodings, deep dejection, are often the first intimations that God is listening to our prayer and is beginning to work within us. You have prayed that God would make you more a blessing to those about you, more useful in your place, more answerable to His ends: and when your prayer has risen to its highest point of confidence and expectation, you are thrown into what seems a worse state than ever, your heart is broken within you, you say, Is this the answer to my prayer, is this God's blessing; if it be so, why am I thus? For things that make a man serious, happen when God takes him in hand, and they that yield themselves to His service will not find that that service is all honour and enjoyment. Its first steps will often land us in a position we can make nothing of, and our attempts to aid others will get us into difficulties with them; and especially will our desire that Christ be formed in us bring into such lively action the evil nature that is in us, that we are torn by the conflict, and our heart lies like the ground of a fierce struggle, seamed and furrowed, tossed and confused. As soon as there is a movement within us in one direction, immediately there is an opposing movement: as soon as one of the natures

says, Do this; the other says, Do it not. The better nature is gaining slightly the upper hand, and by a long, steady strain, seems to be wearying out the other, when suddenly there is one quick stroke and the evil nature conquers. And every movement of the parties is with pain to ourselves; either conscience is wronged, and gives out its cry of shame, or our natural desires are trodden down, and that also is pain. And so disconnected and connected are we, so entirely one with both parties, and yet so able to contemplate both that Rebekah's distress seems aptly enough to symbolize our own. And whether the symbol be apt or no, there can be no question that he who enquires of the Lord as she did, will receive a similar assurance that there are two natures within him, and that "the elder shall serve the younger," the nature last formed, and that seems to give least promise of life, shall master the original, eldest born child of the flesh.

The children whose birth and destinies were thus predicted, at once gave evidence of a difference even greater than that which will often strike one as existing between two brothers, though rarely between twins. The first was born, all over like a hairy garment, presenting the appearance of being rolled up in a fur cloak or the skin of an animal—an appearance which did not pass away in childhood, but so obstinately adhered to him through life, that an imitation of his hands could be produced with the hairy skin of a kid. This was by his parents considered ominous. The want of the hairy covering which the lower animals have, is one of the signs marking out man as destined for a higher and more refined life than they; and when their son appeared in this guise, they could not but

fear it prognosticated his sensual, animal career. So they called him Esau. And so did the younger son from the first show his nature, catching the heel of his brother, as if he were striving to be firstborn; and so they called him Jacob, the heel-catcher or supplanter —as Esau afterwards bitterly observed, a name which precisely suited his crafty, plotting nature, shown in his twice over tripping up and overthrowing his elder brother. The name which Esau handed down to his people was, however, not his original name, but one derived from the colour of that for which he sold his birthright. It was in that exclamation of his, "Feed me with that same *red*," that he disclosed his character.

So different in appearance at birth, they grew up of very different character; and as was natural, he who had the quiet nature of his father was beloved by the mother, and he who had the bold, practical skill of the mother was clung to by the father. It seems unlikely that Rebekah was influenced in her affection by anything but natural motives, though the fact that Jacob was to be the heir must have been much on her mind, and may have produced the partiality which maternal pride sometimes begets. But before we condemn Isaac, or think the historian has not given a full account of his love for Esau, let us ask what we have noticed about the growth and decay of our own affections. We are ashamed of Isaac; but have we not also been sometimes ashamed of ourselves on seeing that our affections are powerfully influenced by the gratification of tastes almost or quite as low as this of Isaacs? He who cunningly panders to our taste for applause, he who purveys for us some sweet morsel of scandal, he who flatters or amuses us, straightway takes a place in our affections which we do not accord

to men of much finer parts, but who do not so minister to our sordid appetites.

The character of Jacob is easily understood. It has frequently been remarked of him that he is thoroughly a Jew, that in him you find the good and bad features of the Jewish character very prominent and conspicuous. He has that mingling of craft and endurance which has enabled his descendants to use for their own ends those who have wronged and persecuted them. The Jew has, with some justice and some injustice, been credited with an obstinate and unscrupulous resolution to forward his own interests, and there can be no question that in this respect Jacob is the typical Jew —ruthlessly taking advantage of his brother, watching and waiting till he was sure of his victim; deceiving his blind father, and robbing him of what he had intended for his favourite son; outwitting the grasping Laban, and making at least his own out of all attempts to rob him; unable to meet his brother without stratagem; not forgetting prudence even when the honour of his family is stained; and not thrown off his guard even by his true and deep affection for Joseph. Yet, while one recoils from this craftiness and management, one cannot but admire the quiet force of character, the indomitable tenacity, and, above all, the capacity for warm affection and lasting attachments, that he showed throughout.

But the quality which chiefly distinguished Jacob from his hunting and marauding brother was his desire for the friendship of God and sensibility to spiritual influences. It may have been Jacob's consciousness of his own meanness that led him to crave connection with some Being or with some prospect that might ennoble his nature and lift him above his

innate disposition. It is an old, old truth that not many noble are called; and, seeing quite as plainly as others see their feebleness and meanness, the ignoble conceive a self-loathing which is sometimes the beginning of an unquenchable thirst for the high and holy God. The consciousness of your bad, poor nature may revive within you day by day, as the remembrance of physical weakness returns to the invalid with every morning's light; but to what else can God so effectively appeal when he offers you present fellowship with Himself and eventual conformity to His own nature?

It has been pointed out that the weakness in Esau's character which makes him so striking a contrast to his brother is his inconstancy.

> "That one error
> Fills him with faults; makes him run through all the sins."

Constancy, persistence, dogged tenacity is certainly the striking feature of Jacob's character. He could wait and bide his time; he could retain one purpose year after year till it was accomplished. The very motto of his life was, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." He watched for Esau's weak moment, and took advantage of it. He served fourteen years for the woman he loved, and no hardship quenched his love. Nay, when a whole lifetime intervened, and he lay dying in Egypt, his constant heart still turned to Rachel, as if he had parted with her but yesterday. In contrast with this tenacious, constant character stands Esau, led by impulse, betrayed by appetite, everything by turns and nothing long. To-day despising his birthright, to-morrow breaking his heart for its loss; to-day vowing he will murder his brother, to-morrow falling on his neck and kissing him; a man

you cannot reckon upon, and of too shallow a nature for anything to root itself deeply in.

The event in which the contrasted characters of the twin brothers were most decisively shown, so decisively shown that their destinies were fixed by it, was an incident which, in its external circumstances, was of the most ordinary and trivial kind. Esau came in hungry from hunting: from dawn to dusk he had been taxing his strength to the utmost, too eagerly absorbed to notice either his distance from home or his hunger; it is only when he begins to return depressed by the ill-luck of the day, and with nothing now to stimulate him, that he feels faint; and when at last he reaches his father's tents, and the savoury smell of Jacob's lentiles greets him, his ravenous appetite becomes an intolerable craving, and he begs Jacob to give him some of his food. Had Jacob done so with brotherly feeling there would have been nothing to record. But Jacob had long been watching for an opportunity to win his brother's birthright, and though no one could have supposed that an heir to even a little property would sell it in order to get a meal five minutes sooner than he could otherwise get it, Jacob had taken his brother's measure to a nicety, and was confident that present appetite would in Esau completely extinguish every other thought.

It is perhaps worth noticing that the birthright in Ishmael's line, the guardianship of the temple at Mecca, passed from one branch of the family to another in a precisely similar way. We read that when the guardianship of the temple and the governorship of the town "fell into the hands of Abu Gabshan, a weak and silly man, Cosa, one of Mohammed's ancestors, circumvented him while in a drunken humour, and

bought of him the keys of the temple, and with them the presidency of it, for a bottle of wine. But Abu Gabshan being gotten out of his drunken fit, sufficiently repented of his foolish bargain; from whence grew these proverbs among the Arabs: More vexed with late repentance than Abu Gabshan; and, More silly than Abu Gabshan—which are usually said of those who part with a thing of great moment for a small matter."

Which brother presents the more repulsive spectacle of the two in this selling of the birthright it is hard to say. Who does not feel contempt for the great, strong man, declaring he will die if he is required to wait five minutes till his own supper is prepared; forgetting, in the craving of his appetite, every consideration of a worthy kind; oblivious of everything but his hunger and his food; crying, like a great baby, Feed me with that *red!* So it is always with the man who has fallen under the power of sensual appetite. He is always going to die if it is not immediately gratified. He *must* have his appetite satisfied. No consideration of consequences can be listened to or thought of; the man is helpless in the hands of his appetite—it rules and drives him on, and he is utterly without self-control; nothing but physical compulsion can restrain him.

But the treacherous and self-seeking craft of the other brother is as repulsive; the cold-blooded, calculating spirit that can hold every appetite in check, that can cleave to one purpose for a life-time, and, without scruple, take advantage of a twin-brother's weakness. Jacob knows his brother thoroughly, and all his knowledge he uses to betray him. He knows he will speedily repent of his bargain, so he makes him swear he will

abide by it. It is a relentless purpose he carries out—he deliberately and unhesitatingly sacrifices his brother to himself.

Still, in two respects, Jacob is the superior man. He can appreciate the birthright in his father's family, and he has constancy. Esau might be a pleasant companion, far brighter and more vivacious than Jacob on a day's hunting; free and open-handed, and not implacable; and yet such people are not satisfactory friends. Often the most attractive people have similar inconstancy; they have a superficial vivacity, and brilliance, and charm, and good-nature, which invite a friendship they do not deserve.

Parents frequently make the mistake of Isaac, and think more highly of the gay, sparkling, but shallow child, than of the child who cannot be always smiling, but broods over what he conceives to be his wrongs. Sulkiness is itself not a pleasing feature in a child's character, but it may only be the childish expression of constancy, and of a depth of character which is slow to let go any impression made upon it. On the other hand, frankness and a quick throwing aside of passion and resentment are pleasing features in a child, but often these are only the expressions of a fickle character, rapidly changing from sun to shower like an April day, and not to be trusted for retaining affection or good impressions any longer than it retains resentment.

But Esau's despising of his birthright is that which stamps the man and makes him interesting to each generation. No one can read the simple account of his reckless act without feeling how justly we are called upon to "look diligently lest there be among us any profane person as Esau, who, for one morsel

of meat, sold his birthright." Had the birthright been something to eat, Esau would not have sold it. What an exhibition of human nature! What an exposure of our childish folly and the infatuation of appetite! For Esau has company in his fall. We are all stricken by his shame. We are conscious that if God had made provision for the flesh we should have listened to Him more readily. "But what will this birthright profit us?" We do not see the good it does: were it something to keep us from disease, to give us long unsated days of pleasure, to bring us the fruits of labour without the weariness of it, to make money for us, where is the man who would not value it—where is the man who would lightly give it up? But because it is only the favour of God that is offered, His endless love, His holiness made ours, this we will imperil or resign for every idle desire, for every lust that bids us serve it a little longer. Born the sons of God, made in His image, introduced to a birthright angels might covet, we yet prefer to rank with the beasts of the field, and let our souls starve if only our bodies be well tended and cared for.

There is in Esau's conduct and after-experience so much to stir serious thought, that one always feels reluctant to pass from it, and as if much more ought to be made of it. It reflects so many features of our own conduct, and so clearly shows us what we are from day to day liable to, that we would wish to take it with us through life as a perpetual admonition. Who does not know of those moments of weakness, when we are fagged with work, and with our physical energy our moral tone has become relaxed? Who does not know how, in hours of reaction from keen and exciting engagements, sensual appetite asserts itself,

and with what petulance we inwardly cry, We shall die if we do not get this or that paltry gratification? We are, for the most part, inconstant as Esau, full of good resolves to-day, and to-morrow throwing them to the winds—to-day proud of the arduousness of our calling, and girding ourselves to self-control and self-denial, to-morrow sinking back to softness and self-indulgence. Not once as Esau, but again and again we barter peace of conscience and fellowship with God and the hope of holiness, for what is, in simple fact, no more than a bowl of pottage. Even after recognising our weakness and the lowness of our tastes, and after repenting with self-loathing and misery, some slight pleasure is enough to upset our steadfast mind, and make us as plastic as clay in the hand of circumstances. It is with positive dismay one considers the weakness and blindness of our hours of appetite and passion: how one goes then like an ox to the slaughter, all unconscious of the pit-falls that betray and destroy men, and how at any moment we ourselves may truly sell our birthright.

XXI.

JACOB'S FRAUD.

GENESIS xxvii.

"The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever. —PSALM xxxiii. 11.

THERE are some families whose miserable existence is almost entirely made up of malicious plottings and counter-plottings, little mischievous designs, and spiteful triumphs of one member or party in the family over the other. It is not pleasant to have the veil withdrawn, and to see that where love and eager self-sacrifice might be expected their places are occupied by an eager assertion of rights, and a cold, proud, and always petty and stupid, nursing of some supposed injury. In the story told us so graphically in this page, we see the family whom God has blessed sunk to this low level, and betrayed by family jealousies into unseemly strife on the most sacred ground. Each member of the family plans his own wicked device, and God by the evil of one defeats the evil of another, and saves His own purpose to bless the race from being frittered away and lost. And it is told us in order that, amidst all this mess of human craft and selfishness, the righteousness and stability of God's word of promise may be more vividly seen. Let us look at the sin of each of the parties in order, and the punishment of each.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews Isaac is commended for his faith in blessing his sons. It was commendable in him that, in great bodily weakness, he still believed himself to be the guardian of God's blessing, and recognised that he had a great inheritance to bequeath to his sons. But, in unaccountable and inconsistent contempt of God's expressed purpose, he proposes to hand over this blessing to Esau. Many things had occurred to fix his attention upon the fact that Esau was not to be his heir. Esau had sold his birthright, and had married Hittite women, and his whole conduct was, no doubt, of a piece with this, and showed that, in his hands, any spiritual inheritance would be both unsafe and unappreciated. That Isaac had some notion he was doing wrong in giving to Esau what belonged to God, and what God meant to give to Jacob, is shown from his precipitation in bestowing the blessing. He has no feeling that he is authorized by God, and therefore he cannot wait calmly till God should intimate, by unmistakable signs, that he is near his end; but, seized with a panic lest his favourite should somehow be left unblessed, he feels, in his nervous alarm, as if he were at the point of death, and, though destined to live for forty-three years longer, he calls Esau that he may hand over to him his dying testament. How different is the nerve of a man when he knows he is doing God's will, and when he is but fulfilling his own device. For the same reason, he has to stimulate his spirit by artificial means. The prophetic ecstasy is not felt by him; he must be exhilarated by venison and wine, that, strengthened and revived in body, and having his gratitude aroused afresh towards Esau, he may bless him with all the greater vigour. The final stimulus is given when he

smells the garments of Esau on Jacob, and when that fresh earthy smell which so revives us in spring, as if our life were renewed with the year, and which hangs about one who has been in the open air, entered into Isaac's blood, and lent him fresh vigour.

It is a strange and, in some respects, perplexing spectacle that is here presented to us—the organ of the Divine blessing represented by a blind old man, laid on a "couch of skins," stimulated by meat and wine, and trying to cheat God by bestowing the family blessing on the son of his own choice to the exclusion of the divinely-appointed heir. Out of such beginnings had God to educate a people worthy of Himself, and through such hazards had He to guide the spiritual blessing He designed to convey to us all.

Isaac laid a net for his own feet. By his unrighteous and timorous haste he secured the defeat of his own long-cherished scheme. It was his hasting to bless Esau which drove Rebekah to checkmate him by winning the blessing for her favourite. The shock which Isaac felt when Esau came in and the fraud was discovered is easily understood. The mortification of the old man must have been extreme when he found that he had so completely taken himself in. He was reclining in the satisfied reflection that for once he had overreached his astute Rebekah and her astute son, and in the comfortable feeling that, at last, he had accomplished his one remaining desire, when he learns from the exceeding bitter cry of Esau that he has himself been duped. It was enough to rouse the anger of the mildest and godliest of men, but Isaac does not storm and protest—"he trembles exceedingly." He recognises, by a spiritual insight quite unknown to Esau, that this is God's hand, and deliberately

confirms, with his eyes open, what he had done in blindness: "I have blessed him: *Yea*, and he shall be blessed." Had he wished to deny the validity of the blessing, he had ground enough for doing so. He had not really given it: it had been stolen from him. An act must be judged by its intention, and he had been far from intending to bless Jacob. Was he to consider himself bound by what he had done under a misapprehension? He had given a blessing to one person under the impression that he was a different person; must not the blessing go to him for whom it was designed? But Isaac unhesitatingly yielded.

This clear recognition of God's hand in the matter, and quick submission to Him, reveals a habit of reflection, and a spiritual thoughtfulness, which are the good qualities in Isaac's otherwise unsatisfactory character. Before he finished his answer to Esau, he felt he was a poor feeble creature in the hand of a true and just God, who had used even his infirmity and sin to forward righteous and gracious ends. It was his sudden recognition of the frightful way in which he had been tampering with God's will, and of the grace with which God had prevented him from accomplishing a wrong destination of the inheritance, that made Isaac tremble very exceedingly.

In this humble acceptance of the disappointment of his life's love and hope, Isaac shows us the manner in which we ought to bear the consequences of our wrong-doing. The punishment of our sin often comes through the persons with whom we have to do, unintentionally on their part, and yet we are tempted to hate them because they pain and punish us, father, mother, wife, child, or whoever else. Isaac and Esau were alike disappointed. Esau only saw the supplanter, and vowed

to be revenged. Isaac saw God in the matter, and trembled. So when Shimei cursed David, and his loyal retainers would have cut off his head for so doing, David said, "Let him alone, and let him curse: it may be that the Lord hath bidden him." We can bear the pain inflicted on us by men when we see that they are merely the instruments of a divine chastisement. The persons who thwart us and make our life bitter, the persons who stand between us and our dearest hopes, the persons whom we are most disposed to speak angrily and bitterly to, are often thorns planted in our path by God to keep us on the right way.

Isaac's sin propagated itself with the rapid multiplication of all sin. Rebekah overheard what passed between Isaac and Esau, and although she might have been able to wait until by fair means Jacob received the blessing, yet when she sees Isaac actually preparing to pass Jacob by and bless Esau, her fears are so excited that she cannot any longer quietly leave the matter in God's hand, but must lend her own more skilful management. It may have crossed her mind that she was justified in forwarding what she knew to be God's purpose. She saw no other way of saving God's purpose and Jacob's rights than by her interference. The emergency might have unnerved many a woman, but Rebekah is equal to the occasion. She makes the threatened exclusion of Jacob the very means for at last finally settling the inheritance upon him. She braves the indignation of Isaac and the rage of Esau, and fearless herself, and confident of success, she soon quiets the timorous and cautious objections of Jacob. She knows that for straightforward lying and acting a part she was sure of good support in Jacob. Luther says, "Had it been me, I'd have dropped the

dish." But Jacob had no such tremors—could submit his hands and face to the touch of Isaac, and repeat his lie as often as needful.

An old man bedridden like Isaac becomes the subject of a number of little deceptions which may seem, and which may be, very unimportant in themselves, but which are seen to wear down the reverence due to the father of a family, and which imperceptibly sap the guileless sincerity and truthfulness of those who practise them. This overreaching of Isaac by dressing Jacob in Esau's clothes, might come in naturally as one of those daily deceptions which Rebekah was accustomed to practise on the old man whom she kept quite in her own hand, giving him as much or as little insight into the doings of the family as seemed advisable to her. It would never occur to her that she was taking God in hand; it would seem only as if she were making such use of Isaac's infirmity as she was in the daily practice of doing.

But to account for an act is not to excuse it. Underlying the conduct of Rebekah and Jacob was the conviction that they would come better speed by a little deceit of their own than by suffering God to further them in His own way—that though God would certainly not practise deception Himself, He might not object to others doing so—that in this emergency holiness was a hampering thing which might just for a little be laid aside that they might be more holy afterwards—that though no doubt in ordinary circumstances, and as a normal habit, deceit is not to be commended, yet in cases of difficulty, which call for ready wit, a prompt seizure, and delicate handling, men must be allowed to secure their ends in their own way. Their unbelief thus directly produced immorality—immorality of a very

revolting kind, the defrauding of their relatives, and repulsive also because practised as if on God's side, or, as we should now say, "in the interests of religion."

To this day the method of Rebekah and Jacob is largely adopted by religious persons. It is notorious that persons whose ends are good frequently become thoroughly unscrupulous about the means they use to accomplish them. They dare not say in so many words that they may do evil that good may come, nor do they think it a tenable position in morals that the end sanctifies the means; and yet their consciousness of a justifiable and desirable end undoubtedly does blunt their sensitiveness regarding the legitimacy of the means they employ. For example, Protestant controversialists, persuaded that vehement opposition to Popery is good, and filled with the idea of accomplishing its downfall, are often guilty of gross misrepresentation, because they do not sufficiently inform themselves of the actual tenets and practices of the Church of Rome. In all controversy, religious and political, it is the same. It is always dishonest to circulate reports that you have no means of authenticating: yet how freely are such reports circulated to blacken the character of an opponent, and to prove his opinions to be dangerous. It is always dishonest to condemn opinions we have not inquired into, merely because of some fancied consequence which these opinions carry in them: yet how freely are opinions condemned by men who have never been at the trouble carefully to inquire into their truth. They do not feel the dishonesty of their position, because they have a general consciousness that they are on the side of religion, and of what has generally passed for truth. All keeping back of facts which are supposed to have an unsettling effect

is but a repetition of this sin. There is no sin more hateful. Under the appearance of serving God, and maintaining His cause in the world, it insults Him by assuming that if the whole bare, undisguised truth were spoken, His cause would suffer.

The fate of all such attempts to manage God's matters by keeping things dark, and misrepresenting fact, is written for all who care to understand in the results of this scheme of Rebekah's and Jacob's. They gained nothing, and they lost a great deal, by their wicked interference. They gained nothing; for God had promised that the birthright would be Jacob's, and would have given it him in some way redounding to his credit and not to his shame. And they lost a great deal. The mother lost her son; Jacob had to flee for his life, and, for all we know, Rebekah never saw him more. And Jacob lost all the comforts of home, and all those possessions his father had accumulated. He had to flee with nothing but his staff, an outcast to begin the world for himself. From this first false step onwards to his death, he was pursued by misfortune, until his own verdict on his life was, "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life."

Thus severely was the sin of Rebekah and Jacob punished. It coloured their whole after-life with a deep sombre hue. It was marked thus, because it was a sin by all means to be avoided. It was virtually the sin of blaming God for forgetting His promise, or of accusing Him of being unable to perform it: so that they, Rebekah and Jacob, had, forsooth, to take God's work out of His hands, and show Him how it ought to be done. The announcement of God's purpose, instead of enabling them quietly to wait for a blessing they knew to be certain, became in their unrighteous and impatient

hearts actually an inducement to sin. Abraham was so bold and confident in his faith, at least latterly, that again and again he refused to take as a gift from men, and on the most honourable terms, what God had promised to give him: his grandson is so little sure of God's truth, that he will rather trust his own falsehood; and what he thinks God may forget to give him, he will steal from his own father. Some persons have especial need to consider this sin—they are tempted to play the part of Providence, to intermeddle where they ought to refrain. Sometimes just a little thing is needed to make everything go to our liking—the keeping back of one small fact, a slight variation in the way of stating the matter, is enough—things want just a little push in the right direction; it is wrong but very slightly so. And so they are encouraged to close for a moment their eyes and put to their hand.

Of all the parties in this transaction none is more to blame than Esau. He shows now how selfish and untruthful the sensual man really is, and how worthless is the generosity which is merely of impulse and not bottomed on principle. While he so furiously and bitterly blamed Jacob for supplanting him, it might surely have occurred to him that it was really he who was supplanting Jacob. He had no right, divine or human, to the inheritance. God had never said that His possession should go to the oldest, and had in this case said the express opposite. Besides, inconstant as Esau was, he could scarcely have forgotten the bargain that so pleased him at the time, and by which he had sold to his younger brother all title to his father's blessings. Jacob was to blame for seeking to win his own by craft, but Esau was more to blame for endeavouring furtively to recover what he knew to be no longer his. His

bitter cry was the cry of a disappointed and enraged child, what Hosea calls the "howl" of those who seem to seek the Lord, but are really merely crying out, like animals, for corn and wine. Many that care very little for God's love will seek His favours; and every wicked wretch who has in his prosperity spurned God's offers, will, when he sees how he has cheated himself, turn to God's gifts, though not to God, with a cry. Esau would now very gladly have given a mess of pottage for the blessing that secured to its receiver "the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine." Like many another sinner, he wanted both to eat his cake and have it. He wanted to spend his youth sowing to the flesh, and have the harvest which those only can have who have sown to the spirit. He wished both of two irreconcilable things—both the red pottage and the birth right. He is a type of those who think very lightly of spiritual blessings while their appetites are strong, but afterwards bitterly complain that their whole life is filled with the results of sowing to the flesh and not to the spirit.

> "We barter life for pottage; sell true bliss
> For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown;
> Thus, Esau-like, our Father's blessing miss,
> Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown."

The words of the New Testament, in which it is said that Esau "found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears," are sometimes misunderstood. They do not mean that he sought what we ordinarily call repentance, a change of mind about the value of the birthright. He *had* that; it was this that made him weep. What he sought now was some means of undoing what he had done, of cancelling the

deed of which he repented. His experience does not tell us that a man once sinning as Esau sinned becomes a hardened reprobate whom no good influence can impress or bring to repentance, but it says that the sin so committed leaves irreparable consequences—that no man can live a youth of folly and yet find as much in manhood and maturer years as if he had lived a careful and God-fearing youth. Esau had irrecoverably lost that which he would now have given all he had to possess; and in this, I suppose, he represents half the men who pass through this world. He warns us that it is very possible, by careless yielding to appetite and passing whim, to entangle ourselves irrecoverably for this life, if not to weaken and maim ourselves for eternity. At the time, your act may seem a very small and secular one, a mere bargain in the ordinary course, a little transaction such as one would enter into carelessly after the day's work is over, in the quiet of a summer evening or in the midst of the family circle; or it may seem so necessary that you never think of its moral qualities, as little as you question whether you are justified in breathing; but you are warned that if there be in that act a crushing out of spiritual hopes to make way for the free enjoyment of the pleasures of sense—if there be a deliberate preference of the good things of this life to the love of God—if, knowingly, you make light of spiritual blessings, and count them unreal when weighed against obvious worldly advantages—then the consequences of that act will in this life bring to you great discomfort and uneasiness, great loss and vexation, an agony of remorse, and a life-long repentance. You are warned of this, and most touchingly, by the moving entreaties, the bitter cries and tears of Esau.

But even even when our life is spoiled irreparably, a hope remains for our character and ourselves—not certainly if our misfortunes embitter us, not if resentment is the chief result of our suffering; but if, subduing resentment, and taking blame to ourselves instead of trying to fix it on others, we take revenge upon the real source of our undoing, and extirpate from our own character the root of bitterness. Painful and difficult is such schooling. It calls for simplicity, and humility, and truthfulness—qualities not of frequent occurrence. It calls for abiding patience; for he who begins thus to sow to the spirit late in life, must be content with inward fruits, with peace of conscience, increase of righteousness and humility, and must learn to live without much of what all men naturally desire.

While each member of Isaac's family has thus his own plan, and is striving to fulfil his private intention, the result is, that God's purpose is fulfilled. In the human agency, such faith in God as existed was overlaid with misunderstanding and distrust of God. But notwithstanding the petty and mean devices, the short-sighted slyness, the blundering unbelief, the profane worldliness of the human parties in the transaction, the truth and mercy of God still find a way for themselves. Were matters left in our hands, we should make shipwreck even of the salvation with which we are provided. We carry into our dealings with it the same selfishness, and inconstancy, and worldliness which made it necessary: and had not God patience to bear with, as well as mercy to invite us; had He not wisdom to govern us in the use of His grace, as well as wisdom to contrive its first bestowal, we should perish with the water of life at our lips.

XXII.

JACOB'S FLIGHT AND DREAM.

GENESIS xxvii. 41—xxviii.

"So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee."—PSALM lxxiii. 22.

IT is so commonly observed as to be scarcely worth again remarking, that persons who employ a great deal of craft in the management of their affairs are invariably entrapped in their own net. Life is so complicated, and every matter of conduct has so many issues, that no human brain can possibly foresee every contingency. Rebekah was a clever woman, and quite competent to outwit men like Isaac and Esau, but she had in her scheming neglected to take account of Laban, a man true brother to herself in cunning. She had calculated on Esau's resentment, and knew it would last only a few days, and this brief period she was prepared to utilize by sending Jacob out of Esau's reach to her own kith and kin, from among whom he might get a suitable wife. But she did not reckon on Laban's making her son serve fourteen years for his wife, nor upon Jacob's falling so deeply in love with Rachel as to make him apparently forget his mother.

In the first part of her scheme she feels herself at home. She is a woman who knows exactly how much of her mind to disclose, so as effectually to lead her

husband to adopt her view and plan. She did not bluntly advise Isaac to send Jacob to Padan-aram, but she sowed in his apprehensive mind fears which she knew would make him send Jacob there; she suggested the possibility of Jacob's taking a wife of the daughters of Heth. She felt sure that *Isaac* did not need to be told where to send his son to find a suitable wife. So Isaac called Jacob, and said, Go to Padan-aram, to the house of thy mother's father, and take thee a wife thence. And he gave him the family blessing—God Almighty give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee—so constituting him his heir, the representative of Abraham.

The effect this had on Esau is very noticeable. He sees, as the narrative tells us, a great many things, and his dull mind tries to make some meaning out of all that is passing before him. The historian seems intentionally to satirise Esau's attempt at reasoning, and the foolish simplicity of the device he fell upon. He had an idea that Jacob's obedience in going to seek a wife of another stock than he had connected himself with would be pleasing to his parents; and perhaps he had an idea that it would be possible to steal a march upon Jacob in his absence, and by a more speedily effected obedience to his parents' desire, win their preference, and perhaps move Isaac to alter his will and reverse the blessing. Though living in the chosen family, he seems to have had not the slightest idea that there was any higher will than his father's being fulfilled in their doings. He does not yet see why he himself should not be as blessed as Jacob; he cannot grasp at all the distinction that grace makes; cannot take in the idea that God has chosen a people to Himself, and that no natural advantage or force or endow-

ment can set a man among that people, but only God's choice. Accordingly, he does not see any difference between Ishmael's family and the chosen family, they are both sprung from Abraham, both are naturally the same, and the fact that God expressly gave His inheritance past Ishmael is nothing to Esau—an act of *God* has no meaning to him. He merely sees that he has not pleased his parents as well as he might by his marriage, and his easy and yielding disposition prompts him to remedy this.

This is a fine specimen of the hazy views men have of what will bring them to a level with God's chosen. Through their crass insensibility to the high righteousness of God, there still does penetrate a perception that if they are to please Him there are certain means to be used for doing so. There are, they see, certain occupations and ways pursued by Christians, and if by themselves adopting these they can please God, they are quite willing to humour Him in this. Like Esau, they do not see their way to drop their old connections, but if by making some little additions to their habits, or forming some new connection, they can quiet this controversy that has somehow grown up between God and His children,—though, so far as they see, it is a very unmeaning controversy,—they will very gladly enter into any little arrangement for the purpose. We will not, of course, divorce the world, will not dismiss from our homes and hearts what God hates and means to destroy, will not accept God's will as our sole and absolute law, but we will so far meet God's wishes as to add to what we have adopted something that is almost as good as what God enjoins: we will make any little alterations which will not quite upset our present ways. Much commoner than hypo-

crisy is this dim-sighted, blundering stupidity of the really profane worldly man, who thinks he can take rank with men whose natures God has changed, by the mere imitation of some of their ways; who thinks, that as he cannot without great labour, and without too seriously endangering his hold on the world, do precisely what God requires, God may be expected to be satisfied with a something like it. Are we not aware of endeavouring at times to cloak a sin with some easy virtue, to adopt some new and apparently good habit, instead of destroying the sin we know God hates; or to offer to God, and palm upon our own conscience, a mere imitation of what God is pleased with? Do you attend Church, do you come and decorously submit to a service? That is not at all what God enjoins, though it is like it. What He means is, that you worship Him, which is a quite different employment. Do you render to God some outward respect, have you adopted some habits in deference to Him, do you even attempt some private devotion and discipline of the spirit? Still what He requires is something that goes much deeper than all that; namely, that you love Him. To conform to one or two habits of godly people is not what is required of us; but to be at heart godly.

As Jacob journeyed northwards, he came, on the second or third evening of his flight, to the hills of Bethel. As the sun was sinking he found himself toiling up the rough path which Abraham may have described to him as looking like a great staircase of rock and crag reaching from earth to sky. Slabs of rock, piled one upon another, form the whole hill-side, and to Jacob's eye, accustomed to the rolling pastures of Beersheba, they would appear almost like a structure built for superhuman uses, well founded in the valley

below, and intended to reach to unknown heights. Overtaken by darkness on this rugged path, he readily finds as soft a bed and as good shelter as his shepherd-habits require, and with his head on a stone and a corner of his dress thrown over his face to preserve him from the moon, he is soon fast asleep. But in his dreams the massive staircase is still before his eyes, and it is no longer himself that is toiling up it as it leads to an unexplored hill-top above him, but the angels of God are ascending and descending upon it, and at its top is Jehovah Himself.

Thus simply does God meet the thoughts of Jacob, and lead him to the encouragement he needed. What was probably Jacob's state of mind when he lay down on that hill-side? In the first place, and as he would have said to any man he chanced to meet, he wondered what he would see when he got to the top of this hill; and still more, as he may have said to Rebekah, he wondered what reception he would meet with from Laban, and whether he would ever again see his father's tents. This vision shows him that his path leads to God, that it is He who occupies the future; and, in his dream, a voice comes to him: "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land." He had, no doubt, wondered much whether the blessing of his father was, after all, so valuable a possession, whether it might not have been wiser to take a share with Esau than to be driven out homeless thus. God has never spoken to him; he has heard his father speak of assurances coming to him from God, but as for him, through all the long years of his life he has never heard what he could speak of as a voice of God. But this night these doubts were silenced—there came to his soul an assurance

that never departed from it. He could have affirmed he heard God saying to him: "I am the Lord God of thy father Abraham, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it." And lastly, all these thoughts probably centred in one deep feeling, that he was an outcast, a fugitive from justice. He was glad he was in so solitary a place, he was glad he was so far from Esau and from every human eye; and yet—what desolation of spirit accompanied this feeling: there was no one he could bid good-night to, no one he could spend the evening hour with in quiet talk; he was a banished man, whatever fine gloss Rebekah might put upon it, and deep down in his conscience there was that which told him he was not banished without cause. Might not God also forsake him—might not God banish him, and might he not find a curse pursuing him, preventing man or woman from ever again looking in his face with pleasure? Such fears are met by the vision. This desolate spot, unvisited by sheep or bird, has become busy with life, angels thronging the ample staircase. Here, where he thought himself lonely and outcast, he finds he has come to the very gate of heaven. His fond mother might, at that hour, have been visiting his silent tent and shedding ineffectual tears on his abandoned bed, but he finds himself in the very house of God, cared for by angels. As the darkness had revealed to him the stars shining overhead, so when the deceptive glare of waking life was dulled by sleep, he saw the actual realities which before were hidden.

No wonder that a vision which so graphically showed the open communication between earth and heaven should have deeply impressed itself on Jacob's descendants. What more effectual consolation could any poor

outcast, who felt he had spoiled his life, require than the memory of this staircase reaching from the pillow of the lonely fugitive from justice up into the very heart of heaven? How could any most desolate soul feel quite abandoned so long as the memory retained the vision of the angels thronging up and down with swift service to the needy? How could it be even in the darkest hour believed that all hope was gone, and that men might but curse God and die, when the mind turned to this bridging of the interval between earth and heaven?

In the New Testament we meet with an instance of the familiarity with this vision which true Israelites enjoyed. Our Lord, in addressing Nathanael, makes use of it in a way that proves this familiarity. Under his fig-tree, whose broad leaves were used in every Jewish garden as a screen from observation, and whose branches were trained down so as to form an open-air oratory, where secret prayer might be indulged in undisturbed, Nathanael had been declaring to the Father his ways, his weaknesses, his hopes. And scarcely more astonished was Jacob when he found himself the object of this angelic ministry on the lonely hill-side, than was Nathanael when he found how one eye penetrated the leafy screen, and had read his thoughts and wishes. Apparently he had been encouraging himself with this vision, for our Lord, reading his thoughts, says: "Because I said unto thee, When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these—thou shalt see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

This, then, is a vision for us even more than for Jacob. It has its fulfilment in the times after the

Incarnation more manifestly than in previous times. The true staircase by which heavenly messengers ascend and descend is the Son of man. It is He who really bridges the interval between heaven and earth, God and man. In His person these two are united. You cannot tell whether Christ is more Divine or human, more God or man—solidly based on earth, as this massive staircase, by His real humanity, by His thirty-three years' engagement in all human functions and all experiences of this life, He is yet familiar with eternity, His name is "He that came down from heaven," and if your eye follows step by step to the heights of His person, it rests at last on what you recognise as Divine. His love it is that is wide enough to embrace God on the one hand, and the lowest sinner on the other. Truly He is the way, the stair, leading from the lowest depth of earth to the highest height of heaven. In Him you find a love that embraces you as you are, in whatever condition, however cast down and defeated, however embittered and polluted—a love that stoops tenderly to you and hopefully, and gives you once more a hold upon holiness and life, and in that very love unfolds to you the highest glory of heaven and of God.

When this comes home to a man in the hour of his need, it becomes the most arousing revelation. He springs from the troubled slumber we call life, and all earth wears a new glory and awe to him. He exclaims with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place. Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." The world that had been so bleak and empty to him, is filled with a majestic vital presence. Jacob is no longer a mere fugitive from the results of his own sin, a shepherd in search of employment, a man setting out in the world to try his fortune; he is the partner with God in the

fulfilment of a Divine purpose. And such is the change that passes on every man who believes in the Incarnation, who feels himself to be connected with God by Jesus Christ; he recognises the Divine intention to uplift his life, and to fill it with new hopes and purposes. He feels that humanity is consecrated by the entrance of the Son of God into it: he feels that all human life is holy ground since the Lord Himself has passed through it. Having once had this vision of God and man united in Christ, life cannot any more be to him the poor, dreary, commonplace, wretched round of secular duties and short-lived joys and terribly punished sins it was before: but it truly becomes the very gate of heaven; from each part of it he knows there is a staircase rising to the presence of God, and that out of the region of pure holiness and justice there flow to him heavenly aids, tender guidance, and encouragement.

Do you think the idea of the Incarnation too aerial and speculative to carry with you for help in rough, practical matters? The Incarnation is not a mere idea, but a fact as substantial and solidly rooted in life as anything you have to do with. Even the shadow of it Jacob saw carried in it so much of what was real that when he was broad awake he trusted it and acted on it. It was not scattered by the chill of the morning air, nor by that fixed staring reality which external nature assumes in the gray dawn as one object after another shows itself in the same spot and form in which night had fallen upon it. There were no angels visible when he opened his eyes; the staircase was there, but it was of no heavenly substance, and if it had any secret to tell, it coldly and darkly kept it. There was no retreat for the runaway from the poor common facts of yesterday. The sky seemed as far from earth as it

did yesterday, his track over the hill as lonely, his brother's wrath as real;—but other things also had become real; and as he looked back from the top of the hill on the stone he had set up, he felt the words, "I am with thee in all places whither thou goest," graven on his heart, and giving him new courage; and he knew that every footfall of his was making a Bethel, and that as he went he was carrying God through the world. The bleakest rains that swept across the hills of Bethel could never wash out of his mind the vision of bright-winged angels, as little as they could wash off the oil or wear down the stone he had set up. The brightest glare of this world's heyday of real life could not outshine and cause them to disappear; and the vision on which we hope is not one that vanishes at cock-crow, nor is He who connects us with God shy of human handling, but substantial as ourselves. He offered Himself to every kind of test, so that those who knew Him for years could say, with the most absolute confidence, "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life . . . declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Jacob obeyed a good instinct when he set up as a monumental stone that which had served as his pillow while he dreamt and saw this inspiring vision. He felt that, vivid as the impression on his mind then was, it would tend to fade, and he erected this stone that in after days he might have a witness that would testify to his present assurance. One great secret in the growth of character is the art of prolonging the quickening power of right ideas, of perpetuating just and inspiring

impressions. And he who despises the aid of all external helps for the accomplishment of this object is not likely to succeed. Religion, some men say, is an inward thing: it does not consist of public worship, ordinances, and so forth, but it is a state of spirit. Very true; but he knows little of human nature who fancies a state of spirit can be maintained without the aid of external reminders, presentations to eye and ear of central religious truths and facts. We have all of us had such views of truth, and such corresponding desires and purposes, as would transform us were they only permanent. But what a night has settled on our past, how little have we found skill to prolong the benefit arising from particular events or occasions. Some parts of our life, indeed, require no monument, there is nothing *there* we would ever again think of, if possible; but, alas! these, for the most part, have erected monuments of their own, to which, as with a sad fascination, our eyes are ever turning—persons we have injured, or who, somehow, so remind us of sin, that we shrink from meeting them—places to which sins of ours have attached a reproachful meaning. And these natural monuments must be imitated in the life of grace. By fixed hours of worship, by rules and habits of devotion, by public worship, and especially by the monumental ordinance of the Lord's Supper, must we cherish the memory of known truth, and deepen former impressions.

To the monument Jacob attached a vow, so that when he returned to that spot the stone might remind him of the dependence on God he now felt, of the precarious situation he was in when this vision appeared, and of all the help God had afterwards given him. He seems to have taken up the meaning of that

endless chain of angels ceaselessly coming down full of blessing, and going up empty of all but desires, requests, aspirations. And if we are to live with clean conscience and with heart open to God, we must so live that the messengers who bring God's blessings to us shall not have an evil report to take back of the manner in which we have received and spent His bounty.

This whole incident makes a special appeal to those who are starting in life. Jacob was no longer a young man, but he was unmarried, and he was going to seek employment with nothing to begin the world with but his shepherd's staff, the symbol of his knowledge of a profession. Many must see in him a very exact reproduction of their own position. They have left home, and it may be they have left it not altogether with pleasant memories, and they are now launched on the world for themselves, with nothing but their staff, their knowledge of some business. The spot they have reached may seem as desolate as the rock where Jacob lay, their prospects as doubtful as his. For such an one there is absolutely no security but that which is given in the vision of Jacob—in the belief that God will be with you in all places, and that even now on that life which you are perhaps already wishing to seclude from all holy influences, the angels of God are descending to bless and restrain you from sin. Happy the man who, at the outset, can heartily welcome such a connection of his life with God: unhappy he who welcomes whatever blots out the thought of heaven, and who separates himself from all that reminds him of the good influences that throng his path. The desire of the young heart to see life and know the world is natural and innocent, but how many fancy that in seeing the lowest and poorest perversions of life they

see life—how many forget that unless they keep their hearts pure they can never enter into the best and richest and most enduring of the uses and joys of human life. Even from a selfish motive and the mere desire to succeed in the world, every one starting in life would do well to consider whether he really has Jacob's blessing and is making his vow. And certainly every one who has any honour, who is governed by any of those sentiments that lead men to noble and worthy actions, will frankly meet God's offers and joyfully accept a heavenly guidance and a permanent connection with God.

Before we dismiss this vision, it may be well to look at one instance of its fulfilment, that we may understand the manner in which God fulfils His promises. Jacob's experience in Haran was not so brilliant and unexceptionable as he might perhaps expect. He did, indeed, at once find a woman he could love, but he had to purchase her with seven years' toil, which ultimately became fourteen years. He did not grudge this; because it was customary, because his affections were strong, and because he was too independent to send to his father for money to buy a wife. But the bitterest disappointment awaited him. With the burning humiliation of one who has been cheated in so cruel a way, he finds himself married to Leah. He protests, but he cannot insist on his protest, nor divorce Leah; for, in point of fact, he is conscious that he is only being paid in his own coin, foiled with his own weapons. In this veiled bride brought in to him on false pretences he sees the just retribution of his own disguise when with the hands of Esau he went in and received his father's blessing. His mouth is shut by the remembrance of his own past. But submitting to this chas-

tisement, and recognising in it not only the craft of his uncle, but the stroke of God, that which he at first thought of as a cruel curse became a blessing. It was Leah much more than Rachel that built up the house of Israel. To this despised wife six of the tribes traced their origin, and among these was the tribe of Judah. Thus he learned the fruitfulness of God's retribution—that to be humbled by God is really to be built up, and to be punished by Him the richest blessing. Through such an experience are many persons led: when we would embrace the fruit of years of toil God thrusts into our arms something quite different from our expectation—something that not only disappoints, but that at first repels us, reminding us of acts of our own we had striven to forget. Is it with resentment you still look back on some such experience, when the reward of years of toil evaded your grasp, and you found yourself bound to what you would not have worked a day to obtain?—do you find yourself disheartened and discouraged by the way in which you seem regularly to miss the fruit of your labour? If so, no doubt it were useless to assure you that the disappointment may be more fruitful than the hope fulfilled, but it can scarcely be useless to ask you to consider whether it is not the fact that in Jacob's case what was thrust upon him *was* more fruitful than what he strove to win.

XXIII.

JACOB AT PENIEL.

GENESIS xxxii.

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up."—JAMES iv. 10.

JACOB had a double reason for wishing to leave Padan-aram. He believed in the promise of God to give him Canaan; and he saw that Laban was a man with whom he could never be on a thoroughly good understanding. He saw plainly that Laban was resolved to make what he could out of his skill at as cheap a rate as possible—the characteristic of a selfish, greedy, ungrateful, and therefore, in the end, ill-served master. Laban and Esau were the two men who had hitherto chiefly influenced Jacob's life. But they were very different in character. Esau could never see that there was any important difference between himself and Jacob—except that his brother was trickier. Esau was the type of those who honestly think that there is not much in religion, and that saints are but white-washed sinners. Laban, on the contrary, is almost superstitiously impressed by the distinction between God's people and others. But the chief practical issue of this impression is, not that he seeks God's friendship for himself, but that he tries to make a profitable use of God's friends. He seeks to get God's blessing, as it

were, at second-hand. If men could be related to God indirectly, as if in law and not by blood, that would suit Laban. If God would admit men to his inheritance on any other terms than being sons in the direct line, if there were some relationship once removed, a kind of sons-in-law, so that mere connection with the godly, though not with God, would win His blessing, this would suit Laban.

Laban is the man who appreciates the social value of virtue, truthfulness, fidelity, temperance, godliness, but wishes to enjoy their fruits without the pain of cultivating the qualities themselves. He is scrupulous as to the character of those he takes into his employment, and seeks to connect himself in business with good men. In his domestic life, he acts on the idea which his experience has suggested to him, that persons really godly will make his home more peaceful, better regulated, safer than otherwise it might be. If he holds a position of authority, he knows how to make use, for the preservation of order and for the promotion of his own ends, of the voluntary efforts of Christian societies, of the trustworthiness of Christian officials, and of the support of the Christian community. But with all this recognition of the reality and influence of godliness, he never for one moment entertains the idea of himself becoming a godly man. In all ages there are Labans, who clearly recognise the utility and worth of a connection with God, who have been much mixed up with persons in whom that worth was very conspicuous, and who yet, at the last, "depart and return unto their place," like Jacob's father-in-law, without having themselves entered into any affectionate relations with God.

From Laban, then, Jacob was resolved to escape. And though to escape with large droves of slow-moving

sheep and cattle, as well as with many women and children, seemed hopeless, the cleverness of Jacob did not fail him here. He did not get beyond reach of pursuit; he could never have expected to do so. But he stole away to such a distance from Haran as made it much easier for him to come to terms with Laban, and much more difficult for Laban to try any further device for detaining him.

But, delivered as he was from Laban, he had an even more formidable person to deal with. As soon as Laban's company disappear on the northern horizon, Jacob sends messengers south to sound Esau. His message is so contrived as to beget the idea in Esau's mind that his younger brother is a person of some importance, and yet is prepared to show greater deference to himself than formerly. But the answer brought back by the messengers is the curt and haughty despatch of the man of war to the man of peace. No notice is taken of Jacob's vaunted wealth. No proposal of terms as if Esau had an equal to deal with, is carried back. There is only the startling announcement: "Esau cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." Jacob at once recognises the significance of this armed advance on Esau's part. Esau has not forgotten the wrong he suffered at Jacob's hands, and he means to show him that he is entirely in his power.

Therefore was Jacob "greatly afraid and distressed." The joy with which, a few days ago, he had greeted the host of God, was quite overcast by the tidings brought him regarding the host of Esau. Things heavenly do always look so like a mere show; visits of angels seem so delusive and fleeting; the exhibition of the powers of heaven seems so often but as a tournament painted on the sky, and so unavailable for the

stern encounters that await us on earth, that one seems, even after the most impressive of such displays, to be left to fight on alone. No wonder Jacob is disturbed. His wives and dependants gather round him in dismay; the children, catching the infectious panic, cower with cries and weeping about their mothers; the whole camp is rudely shaken out of its brief truce by the news of this rough Esau, whose impetuosity and warlike ways they had all heard of and were now to experience. The accounts of the messengers would no doubt grow in alarming descriptive detail as they saw how much importance was attached to their words. Their accounts would also be exaggerated by their own unwarlike nature, and by the indistinctness with which they had made out the temper of Esau's followers, and the novelty of the equipments of war they had seen in his camp. Could we have been surprised had Jacob turned and fled when thus he was made to picture the troops of Esau sweeping from his grasp all he had so laboriously earned, and snatching the promised inheritance from him when in the very act of entering on possession? But though in fancy he already hears their rude shouts of triumph as they fall upon his defenceless band, and already sees the merciless horde dividing the spoil with shouts of derision and coarse triumph, and though all around him are clamouring to be led into a safe retreat, Jacob sees stretched before him the land that is his, and resolves that, by God's help, he shall win it. What he does is not the act of a man rendered incompetent through fear, but of one who has recovered from the first shock of alarm and has all his wits about him. He disposes his household and followers in two companies, so that each might advance with the hope that it might be the one which

should not meet Esau; and having done all that his circumstances permit, he commends himself to God in prayer.

After Jacob had prayed to God, a happy thought strikes him, which he at once puts in execution. Anticipating the experience of Solomon, that "a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city," he, in the style of a skilled tactician, lays siege to Esau's wrath, and directs against it train after train of gifts, which, like successive battalions pouring into a breach, might at length quite win his brother. This disposition of his peaceful battering trains having occupied him till sunset, he retires to the short rest of a general on the eve of battle. As soon as he judges that the weaker members of the camp are refreshed enough to begin their eventful march, he rises and goes from tent to tent awaking the sleepers, and quickly forming them into their usual line of march, sends them over the brook in the darkness, and himself is left alone, not with the depression of a man who waits for the inevitable, but with the high spirits of intense activity, and with the return of the old complacent confidence of his own superiority to his powerful but sluggish-minded brother—a confidence regained now by the certainty he felt, at least for the time, that Esau's rage could not blaze through all the relays of gifts he had sent forward. Having in this spirit seen all his camp across the brook, he himself pauses for a moment, and looks with interest at the stream before him, and at the promised land on its southern bank. This stream, too, has an interest for him as bearing a name like his own—a name that signifies the "struggler," and was given to the mountain torrent from the pain and difficulty with

which it seemed to find its way through the hills. Sitting on the bank of the stream, he sees gleaming through the darkness the foam that it churned as it writhed through the obstructing rocks, or heard through the night the roar of its torrent as it leapt downwards, tortuously finding its way towards Jordan; and Jacob says, So will I, opposed though I be, win my way, by the circuitous routes of craft or by the impetuous rush of courage, into the land whither that stream is going. With compressed lips, and step as firm as when, twenty years before, he left the land, he rises to cross the brook and enter the land—he rises, and is seized in a grasp that he at once owns as formidable. But surely this silent close, as of two combatants who at once recognise one another's strength, this protracted strife, does not look like the act of a depressed man, but of one whose energies have been strung to the highest pitch, and who would have borne down the champion of Esau's host had he at that hour opposed his entrance into the land which Jacob claimed as his own, and into which, as his glove, pledging himself to follow, he had thrown all that was dear to him in the world. It was no common wrestler that would have been safe to meet him in that mood.

Why, then, was Jacob thus mysteriously held back while his household were quietly moving forward in the darkness? What is the meaning, purpose, and use of this opposition to his entrance? These are obvious from the state of mind Jacob was in. He was going forward to meet Esau under the impression that there was no other reason why he should not inherit the land but only his wrath, and pretty confident that by his superior talent, his mother-wit, he could make

a tool of this stupid, generous brother of his. And the danger was, that if Jacob's device had succeeded, he would have been confirmed in these impressions, and have believed that he had won the land from Esau, with God's help certainly, but still by his own indomitable pertinacity of purpose and skill in dealing with men. Now, this was not the state of the case at all. Jacob had, by his own deceit, become an exile from the land, had been, in fact, banished for fraud; and though God had confirmed to him the covenant, and promised to him the land, yet Jacob had apparently never come to any such thorough sense of his sin and entire incompetency to win the birth-right for himself, as would have made it *possible* for him to receive simply as God's gift this land which as God's gift was alone valuable. Jacob does not yet seem to have taken up the difference between inheriting a thing as God's gift, and inheriting it as the meed of his own prowess. To such a man God cannot *give* the land; Jacob cannot receive it. He is thinking only of winning it, which is not at all what God means, and which would, in fact, have annulled all the covenant, and lowered Jacob and his people to the level simply of other nations who had to win and keep their territories at their risk, and not as the blessed of God. If Jacob then is to get the land, he must take it as a gift, which he is not prepared to do. During the last twenty years he has got many a lesson which might have taught him to distrust his own management, and he had, to a certain extent, acknowledged God; but his Jacob-nature, his subtle, scheming nature, was not so easily made to stand erect, and still he is for wriggling himself into the promised land. He is coming back to the land under the impression that God needs to be

managed, that even though we have His promises it requires dexterity to get them fulfilled, that a man will get into the inheritance all the readier for knowing what to veil from God and what to exhibit, when to cleave to His word with great profession of most humble and absolute reliance on Him, and when to take matters into one's own hand. Jacob, in short, was about to enter the land as Jacob, the supplanter, and that would never do; he was going to win the land from Esau by guile, or as he might; and not to receive it from God. And, therefore, just as he is going to step into it, there lays hold of him, not an armed emissary of his brother, but a far more formidable antagonist—if Jacob will win the land, if it is to be a mere trial of skill, a wrestling match, it must at least be with the right person. Jacob is met with his own weapons. He has not chosen war, so no armed opposition is made; but with the naked force of his own nature, he is prepared for any man who will hold the land against him; with such tenacity, toughness, quick presence of mind, elasticity, as nature has given him, he is confident he can win and hold his own. So the real proprietor of the land strips himself for the contest, and lets him feel, by the first hold he takes of him, that if the question be one of mere strength he shall never enter the land.

This wrestling therefore was by no means actually or symbolically prayer. Jacob was not aggressive, nor did he stay behind his company to spend the night in praying for them. It was God who came and laid hold on Jacob to prevent him from entering the land in the temper he was in, and as Jacob. He was to be taught that it was not only Esau's appeased wrath, or his own skilful smoothing down of his brother's ruffled temper,

that gave him entrance; but that a nameless Being, Who came out upon him from the darkness, guarded the land, and that by His passport only could he find entrance. And henceforth, as to every reader of this history so much more to Jacob's self, the meeting with Esau and the overcoming of his opposition were quite secondary to and eclipsed by his meeting and prevailing with this unknown combatant.

This struggle had, therefore, immense significance for the history of Jacob. It is, in fact, a concrete representation of the attitude he had maintained towards God throughout his previous history; and it constitutes the turning point at which he assumes a new and satisfactory attitude. Year after year Jacob had still retained confidence in himself; he had never been thoroughly humbled, but had always felt himself able to regain the land he had lost by his sin. And in this struggle he shows this same determination and self-confidence. He wrestles on indomitably. As Kurtz, whom I follow in his interpretation of this incident, says, "All along Jacob's life had been the struggle of a clever and strong, a pertinacious and enduring, a self-confident and self-sufficient person, who was sure of the result only when he helped himself—a contest with God, who wished to break his strength and wisdom, in order to bestow upon him real strength in divine weakness, and real wisdom in divine folly." All this self-confidence culminates now, and in one final and sensible struggle, his Jacob-nature, his natural propensity to wrest what he desires and win what he aims at, from the most unwilling opponent, does its very utmost and does it in vain. His steady straining, his dexterous feints, his quick gusts of vehement assault, make no impression on this combatant and

move him not one foot off his ground. Time after time his crafty nature puts out all its various resources, now letting his grasp relax and feigning defeat, and then with gathered strength hurling himself on the stranger, but all in vain. What Jacob had often surmised during the last twenty years, what had flashed through him like a sudden gleam of light when he found himself married to Leah, that he was in the hands of one against whom it is quite useless to struggle, he now again begins to suspect. And as the first faint dawn appears, and he begins dimly to make out the face, the quiet breathing of which he had felt on his own during the contest, the man with whom he wrestles touches the strongest sinew in Jacob's body, and the muscle on which the wrestler most depends shrivels at the touch and reveals to the falling Jacob how utterly futile had been all his skill and obstinacy, and how quickly the stranger might have thrown and mastered him.

All in a moment, as he falls, Jacob sees how it is with him, and Who it is that has met him thus. As the hard, stiff, corded muscle shrivelled, so shrivelled his obdurate, persistent self-confidence. And as he is thrown, yet cleaves with the natural tenacity of a wrestler to his conqueror; so, utterly humbled before this Mighty One whom now he recognises and owns, he yet cleaves to Him and entreats His blessing. It is at this touch, which discovers the Almighty power of Him with whom he has been contending, that the whole nature of Jacob goes down before God. He sees how foolish and vain has been his obstinate persistence in striving to trick God out of His blessing, or wrest it from Him, and now he owns his utter incapacity to advance one step in this way, he admits to himself that he is stopped, weakened in the way, thrown on his

back, and can effect nothing, simply nothing, by what he thought would effect all; and, therefore, he passes from wrestling to praying, and with tears, as Hosea says, sobs out from the broken heart of the strong man, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." In making this transition from the boldness and persistence of self-confidence to the boldness of faith and humility, Jacob becomes Israel—the supplanter, being baffled by his conqueror, rises a Prince. Disarmed of all other weapons, he at last finds and uses the weapons wherewith God is conquered, and with the simplicity and guilelessness now of an Israelite indeed, face to face with God, hanging helpless with his arms around Him, he supplicates the blessing he could not win.

Thus, as Abraham had to become God's heir in the simplicity of humble dependence on God; as Isaac had to lay himself on God's altar with absolute resignation, and so become the heir of God, so Jacob enters on the inheritance through the most thorough humbling. Abraham had to give up all possessions and live on God's promise; Isaac had to give up life itself; Jacob had to yield his very self, and abandon all dependence on his own ability. The new name he receives signalizes and interprets this crisis in his life. He enters his land not as Jacob, but as Israel. The man who crossed the Jabbok was not the same as he who had cheated Esau and outwitted Laban and determinedly striven this morning with the angel. He was Israel, God's prince, entering on the land freely bestowed on him by an authority none could resist; a man who had learned that in order to receive from God, one must ask.

Very significant to Jacob in his after life must have been the lameness consequent on this night's struggle. He, the wrestler, had to go halting all his days. He

who had carried all his weapons in his own person, in his intelligent watchful eye and tough right arm, he who had felt sufficient for all emergencies and a match for all men, had now to limp along as one who had been worsted and baffled and could not hide his shame from men. So it sometimes happens that a man never recovers the severe handling he has received at some turning point in his life. Often there is never again the same elastic step, the same free and confident bearing, the same apparent power, the same appearance to our fellow-men of completeness in our life; but, instead of this, there is a humble decision which, if it does not walk with so free a gait, yet knows better what ground it is treading and by what right. To the end some men bear the marks of the heavy stroke by which God first humbled them. It came in a sudden shock that broke their health, or in a disappointment which nothing now given can ever quite obliterate the trace of, or in circumstances painfully and permanently altered. And the man has to say with Jacob, I shall never now be what I might have been; I was resolved to have my own way, and though God in His mercy did not suffer me to destroy myself, yet to drive me from my purpose He was forced to use a violence, under the effects of which I go halting all my days, saved and whole, yet maimed to the end of time. I am not ashamed of the mark, at least when I think of it as God's signature I am able to glory in it, but it never fails to remind me of a perverse wilfulness I am ashamed of. With many men God is forced to such treatment; if any of us are under it, God forbid we should mistake its meaning and lie prostrate and despairing in the darkness instead of clinging to Him Who has smitten and will heal us.

For the treatment which Jacob received at Peniel must not be set aside as singular or exceptional. Sometimes God interposes between us and a greatly-desired possession which we have been counting upon as our right and as the fair and natural consequence of our past efforts and ways. The expectation of this possession has indeed determined our movements and shaped our life for some time past, and it would not only be assigned to us by men as fairly ours, but God also has Himself seemed to encourage us to win it. Yet when it is now within sight, and when we are rising to pass the little stream which seems alone to separate us from it, we are arrested by a strong, an irresistible hand. The reason is, that God wishes us to be in such a state of mind that we shall receive it as His gift, so that it becomes ours by an indefeasible title.

Similarly, when advancing to a spiritual possession, such checks are not without their use. Many men look with longing to what is eternal and spiritual, and they resolve to win this inheritance. And this resolve they often make as if its accomplishment depended solely on their own endurance. They leave almost wholly out of account that the possibility of their entering the state they long for is not decided by their readiness to pass through any ordeal, spiritual or physical, which may be required of them, but by God's willingness to give it. They act as if by taking advantage of God's promises, and by passing through certain states of mind and prescribed duties, they could, irrespective of God's present attitude towards them and constant love, win eternal happiness. In the life of such persons there must therefore come a time when their own spiritual energy seems all to collapse in that

painful, utter way in which, when the body is exhausted, the muscles are suddenly found to be cramped and heavy and no longer responsive to the will. They are made to feel that a spiritual dislocation has taken place, and that their eagerness to enter life everlasting no longer stirs the active energies of the soul.

In that hour the man learns the most valuable truth he can learn, that it is God Who is wishing to save him, not he who must wrest a blessing from an unwilling God. Instead of any longer looking on himself as against the world, he takes his place as one who has the whole energy of God's will at his back, to give him rightful entrance into all blessedness. So long as Jacob was in doubt whether it was not some kind of man that was opposing him, he wrestled on; and our foolish ways of dealing with God terminate, when we recognise that He is not such an one as ourselves. We naturally act as if God had some pleasure in thwarting us—as if we could, and even ought to, maintain a kind of contest with God. We deal with Him as if He were opposed to our best purposes and grudged to advance us in all good, and as if He needed to be propitiated by penitence and cajoled by forced feelings and sanctimonious demeanour. We act as if we could make more way were God not in our way, as if our best prospects began in our own conception and we had to win God over to our views. If God is unwilling, then there is an end: no device nor force will get us past Him. If He is willing, why all this unworthy dealing with Him, as if the whole idea and accomplishment of salvation did not proceed from Him?

XXIV.

JACOB'S RETURN.

GENESIS XXXV.

"As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way."—GEN. xlviii. 7.

THE words of the Wrestler at the brook Jabbok, "Let me go, for the day breaketh," express the truth that spiritual things will not submit themselves to sensible tests. When we seek to let the full daylight, by which we discern other objects, stream upon them, they elude our grasp. When we fancy we are on the verge of having our doubts for ever scattered, and our suppositions changed into certainties, the very approach of clear knowledge and demonstration seems to drive those sensitive spiritual presences into darkness. As Pascal remarked, and remarked as the mouth-piece of all souls that have earnestly sought for God, the world only gives us indications of the presence of a God Who conceals Himself. It is, indeed, one of the most mysterious characteristics of our life in this world, that the great Existence which originates and embraces all other Beings, should Himself be so silent and concealed: that there should be need of subtle arguments to prove His existence, and that no argument ever conceived has been found sufficiently cogent to convince all men. One is always tempted

to say, how easy to end all doubt, how easy for God so to reveal Himself as to make unbelief impossible, and give to all men the glad consciousness that they have a God.

The reason of this "reserve" of God must lie in the nature of things. The greatest forces in nature are silent and unobtrusive and incomprehensible. Without the law of gravitation the universe would rush into ruin, but who has ever seen this force? Its effects are everywhere visible, but itself is shrouded in darkness and cannot be comprehended. So much more must the Infinite Spirit remain unseen and baffling all comprehension. "No man hath seen God at any time" must ever remain true. To ask for God's name, therefore, as Jacob did, is a mistake. For almost every one supposes that when he knows the name of a thing, he knows also its nature. The giving of a name, therefore, tends to discourage enquiry, and to beget an unfounded satisfaction as if, when we know what a thing is called, we know what it is. The craving, therefore, which we all feel in common with Jacob—to have all mystery swept from between us and God, and to see Him face to face, so that we may know Him as we know our friends—is a craving which cannot be satisfied. You cannot ever know God as He is. Your mind cannot comprehend a Being who is pure Spirit, inhabiting no body, present with you here but present also hundreds of millions of miles away, related to time and to space and to matter in ways utterly impossible for you to comprehend.

What is possible, God has done. He has made Himself known in Christ. We are assured, on testimony that stands every kind of test, that in Him, if nowhere else, we find God. And yet even by Christ

this same law of reserve if not concealment was observed. Not only did He forbid men and devils to proclaim who He was, but when men, weary of their own doubts and debatings, impatiently challenged him, "If thou be the Christ tell us plainly," He declined to do so. For really men must grow to the knowledge of Him. Even a human face cannot be known by once or twice seeing it; the practised artist often misses the expression best loved by the intimate friend, or by the relative whose own nature interprets to him the face in which he sees himself reflected. Much more can the child of God only attain to the knowledge of his Father's face by first of all *being* a child of God, and then by gradually growing up into His likeness.

But though God's operation is in darkness the results of it are in the light. "As Jacob passed over Peniel, the *sun rose* upon him, and he halted upon his thigh." As Jacob's company halted when they missed him, and as many anxious eyes were turned back into the darkness, they were unable still to see him; and even when the darkness began to scatter, and they saw dimly and far off a human figure, the sharpest eyes among them declare it cannot be Jacob, for the gait and walk, which alone they can judge by at that distance and in that light, are not his. But when at last the first ray of sunlight streams on him from over the hills of Gilead, all doubt is at an end; it *is* Jacob, but halting on his thigh. And he himself finds it is not a strain which the walking of a few paces will ease, nor a night cramp which will pass off, nor a mere dream which would vanish in broad day, but a real permanent lameness which he must explain to his company. Has he missed a step on the bank in the darkness, or stumbled or slipped on the slippery stones of the ford? It is a far

more real thing to him than any such accident. So, however others may discredit the results of a work on the soul which they have not seen—however they may say of the first and most obvious results, "This is but a sickness of soul which the rising sun will dispel; a feigned peculiarity of walk which will be forgotten in the bustle of the day's work"—it is not so, but every contact with real life makes it more obvious that when God touches a man the result is real. And as Jacob's household and children in all generations counted that sinew which shrank sacred, and would not eat of it, so surely should we be reverential towards God's work in the soul of our neighbour, and respect even those peculiarities which are often the most obvious first-fruits of conversion, and which make it difficult for us to walk in the same comfort with these persons, and keep step with them as easily as once we did. A reluctance to live like other good people, an inability to share their innocent amusements, a distaste for the very duties of this life, a harsh or reserved bearing towards unconverted persons, an awkwardness in speaking of their religious experience, as well as an awkwardness in applying it to the ordinary circumstances of their life,—these and many other of the results of God's work on the soul should not be rudely dealt with, but respected; for though not in themselves either seemly or beneficial, they are evidence of God's touch.

After this contest with the angel, the meeting of Jacob with Esau has no separate significance. Jacob succeeds with his brother because already he has prevailed with God. He is on a satisfactory footing now with the Sovereign who alone can bestow the land and judge betwixt him and his brother. Jacob can no longer suppose that the chief obstacle to his advance is

the resentment of Esau. He has felt and submitted to a stronger hand than Esau's. Such schooling we all need : and get, if we will take it. Like Jacob, we have to make our way to our end through numberless human interferences and worldly obstacles. Some of these we have to flee from, as Jacob from Laban; others we must meet and overcome, as our Esaus. Our own sin or mistake has put us under the power of some whose influence is disastrous; others, though we are not under their power at all, yet, consciously or unconsciously to themselves, continually cross our path and thwart us, keep us back and prevent us from effecting what we desire, and from shaping things about us according to our own ideas. And there will, from time to time, be present to our minds obvious ways in which we could defeat the opposition of these persons, and by which we fancy we could triumph over them. And what we are here taught is, that we need look for no triumph, and it is a pity for us if we win a triumph over any human opposition, however purely secular and unchristian, without first having prevailed with God in the matter. He comes in between us and all men and things, and, laying His hand on us, arrests us from further progress till we have to the very bottom and in every part adjusted the affair with Him—and then, standing right with Him, we can very easily, or at least we *can*, get right with all things. And it should be a suggestive and fruitful thought to the most of us that, in all cases in which we sin against our brother, God presents Himself as the champion of the wronged party. One day or other we must meet not the strongest putting of all those cases in which we have erred as the offended party could himself put them, but we must meet them as put by the Eternal Advocate of justice

and right, who saw our spirit, our merely selfish calculating, our base motive, our impure desire, our unrighteous deed. Gladly would Jacob have met the mightiest of Esau's host in place of this invincible opponent, and it is this same Mighty One, this same watchful guardian of right Who threw Himself in Jacob's way, Who has His eye on us, Who has tracked us through all our years, and Who will certainly one time appear in our path as the champion of every one we have wronged, of every one whose soul we have put in jeopardy, of every one to whom we have not done what God intended we should do, of every one whom we have attempted merely to make use of; and in stating their case and showing us what justice and duty would have required of us, He will make us feel, what we cannot feel till He Himself convinces us, that, in all our dealings with men, wherein we have wronged them we have wronged Him.

The narrative now prepares to leave Jacob and make room for Joseph. It brings him back to Bethel, thereby completing the history of his triumph over the difficulties with which his life had been so thickly studded. The interest and much of the significance of a man's life come to an end when position and success are achieved. The remaining notices of Jacob's experience are of a sorrowful kind; he lives under a cloud until at the close the sun shines out again. We have seen him in his youth making experiments in life; in his prime founding a family and winning his way by slow and painful steps to his own place in the world; and now he enters on the last stage of his life, a stage in which signs of breaking up appear almost as soon as he attains his aim and place in life.

After all that had happened to Jacob, we should

have expected him to make for Bethel as rapidly as his unwieldy company could be moved forwards. But the pastures that had charmed the eye of his grandfather captivated Jacob as well. He bought land at Shechem, and appeared willing to settle there. The vows which he had uttered with such fervour when his future was precarious are apparently quite forgotten, or more probably neglected, now that danger seems past. To go to Bethel involved the abandonment of admirable pastures, and the introduction of new religious views and habits into his family life. A man who has large possessions, difficult and precarious relations to sustain with the world, and a household unmanageable from its size, and from the variety of dispositions included in it, requires great independence and determination to carry out domestic reform on religious grounds. Even a slight change in our habits is often delayed because we are shy of exposing to observation fresh and deep convictions on religious subjects. Besides, we forget our fears and our vows when the time of hardship passes away; and that which, as young men, we considered almost hopeless, we at length accept as our right, and omit all remembrance and gratitude. A spiritual experience that is separated from your present by twenty years of active life, by a foreign residence, by marriage, by the growing up of a family around you, by other and fresher spiritual experiences, is apt to be very indistinctly remembered. The obligations you then felt and owned have been overlaid and buried in the lapse of years. And so it comes that a low tone is introduced into your life, and your homes cease to be model homes.

Out of this condition Jacob was roughly awakened. Sinning by unfaithfulness and softness towards his

family, he is, according to the usual law, punished by family disaster of the most painful kind. The conduct of Simeon and Levi was apparently due quite as much to family pride and religious fanaticism as to brotherly love or any high moral view. In them first we see how the true religion, when held by coarse and ungodly men, becomes the root of all evil. We see the first instance of that fanaticism which so often made the Jews a curse rather than a blessing to other nations. Indeed, it is but an instance of the injustice, cruelty, and violence that at all times result where men suppose that they themselves are raised to quite peculiar privileges and to a position superior to their fellows, without recognising also that this position is held by the grace of a holy God and for the good of their fellows.

Jacob is now compelled to make a virtue of necessity. He flees to Bethel to escape the vengeance of the Shechemites. To such serious calamities do men expose themselves by arguing with conscience and by refusing to live up to their engagements. How can men be saved from living merely for sheep-feeding and cattle-breeding and trade and enjoyment? how can they be saved from gradually expelling from their character all principle and all high sentiment that conflicts with immediate advantage and present pleasure, save by such irresistible blows as here compelled Jacob to shift his camp? He has spiritual perception enough left to see what is meant. The order is at once issued: "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." Thus

frankly does he acknowledge his error, and repair, so far as he can, the evil he has done. Thus decidedly does he press God's command on those whom he had hitherto encouraged or connived at. Even from his favourite Rachel he takes her gods and buries them. The fierce Simeon and Levi, proud of the blood with which they had washed out their sister's stain, are ordered to cleanse their garments and show some seemly sorrow, if they can.

If years go by without any such incident occurring in our life as drives us to a recognition of our moral laxity and deterioration, and to a frank and humble return to a closer walk with God, we had need to strive to awaken ourselves and ascertain whether we are living up to old vows and are really animated by thoroughly worthy motives. It was when Jacob came back to the very spot where he had lain on the open hill-side, and pointed out to his wives and children the stone he had set up to mark the spot, that he felt humbled as he cast his eye over the flocks and tents he now owned. And if you can, like Jacob, go back to spots in your life which were very woful and perplexed, years even when all continued dreary, dark, and hopeless, when friendlessness and poverty, bereavement or disease, laid their chilling, crushing hands upon you, times when you could not see what possible good there was for you in the world; and if now all this is solved, and your condition is in the most striking contrast to what you can remember, it becomes you to make acknowledgment to God such as you may have made to your friends, such acknowledgment as makes it plain that you are touched by His kindness. The acknowledgment Jacob made was sensible and honest. He put away the gods which had divided the worship

of his family. In our life there is probably that which constantly tends to usurp an undue place in our regard; something which gives us more pleasure than the thought of God, or from which we really expect a more palpable benefit than we expect from God, and which, therefore, we cultivate with far greater assiduity. How easily, if we really wish to be on a clear footing with God, can we discover what things should be cast revengefully from us, buried and stamped upon and numbered with the things of the past. Are there not in your life any objects for the sake of which you sacrifice that nearness to God, and that sure hold of Him you once enjoyed? Are you not conscious of any pursuits, or hopes, or pleasures, or employments which practically have the effect of making you indifferent to spiritual advancement, and which make you shy of Bethel—shy of all that sets clear before you your indebtedness to God, and your own past vows and resolves?

"But," continues the narrative, "*but* Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died;" that is, although Jacob and his house were now living in the fear of God, that did not exempt them from the ordinary distresses of family life. And among these, one that falls on us with a chastening and mild sadness all its own, occurs when there passes from the family one of its oldest members, and one who has by the delicate tact of love gained influence over all, and has by the common consent become the arbiter and mediator, the confidant and counsellor of the family. They, indeed, are the true salt of the earth whose own peace is so deep and abiding, and whose purity is so thorough and energetic, that into their ear we can disburden the troubled heart or the guilty conscience, as the wildest brook disturbs

not and the most polluted fouls not the settled depths of the all-cleansing ocean. Such must Deborah have been, for the oak under which she was buried was afterwards known as "the oak of weeping." Specially must Jacob himself have mourned the death of her whose face was the oldest in his remembrance, and with whom his mother and his happy early days were associated. Very dear to Jacob, as to most men, were those who had been connected with and could tell him of his parents, and remind him of his early years. Deborah, by treating him still as a little boy, perhaps the only one who now called him by the pet name of childhood, gave him the pleasantest relief from the cares of manhood and the obsequious deportment of the other members of his household towards him. So that when she went a great blank was made to him. no longer was the wise and happy old face seen in her tent door to greet him of an evening; no longer could he take refuge in the peacefulness of her old age from the troubles of his lot: she being gone, a whole generation was gone, and a new stage of life was entered on.

But a heavier blow, the heaviest that death could inflict, soon fell upon him. She who had been as God's gift and smile to him since ever he had left Bethel at the first is taken from him now that he is restored to God's house. The number of his sons is completed, and the mother is removed. Suddenly and unexpectedly the blow fell, as they were journeying and fearing no ill. Notwithstanding the confident and cheering, though ambiguous, assurances of those about her, she had that clear knowledge of her own state which, without contradicting, simply put aside such assurances, and, as her soul was departing, feebly

named her son Benoni, Son of my sorrow. She felt keenly what was, to a nature like hers, the very anguish of disappointment. She was never to feel the little creature stirring in her arms with personal human life, nor see him growing up to manhood as the son of his father's right hand. It was this sad death of Rachel's which made her the typical mother in Israel. It was not an unclouded, merely prosperous life which could fitly have foreshadowed the lives of those by whom the promised seed was to come; and least of all of the virgin to whom it was said, "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." It was the wail of Rachel that poetical minds among the Jews heard from time to time mourning their national disasters—"Rachel weeping" for her children, when by captivity they were separated from their mother country, or when, by the sword of Herod, the mothers of Bethlehem were bereaved of their babes. But it was also observed that that which brought this anguish on the mothers of Bethlehem was the birth there of the last Son of Israel, the blossom of this long-growing plant, suddenly born after a long and barren period, the son of Israel's right hand.

Still another death is registered in this chapter. It took place twelve years after Joseph went into Egypt, but is set down here for convenience. Esau and Jacob are, for the last time, brought together over their dead father—and for the last time, as they see that family likeness which comes out so strikingly in the face of the dead, do they feel drawn with brotherly affection to greet one another as sons of one father. In the dead Isaac, too, they find an object of veneration more impressive than they had found in the living father: the infirmities of age are exchanged for the mystery

and majesty of death; the man has passed out of reach of pity, of contempt; the shrill, uncontrolled treble is no longer heard, there are no weak, plaintive movements, no childishness; but a solemn, august silence, a silence that seems to bid on-lookers be still and refrain from disturbing the first communings of the departed spirit with things unseen.

The tenderness of these two brothers towards one another and towards their father was probably quickened by remorse when they met at his deathbed. They could not, perhaps, think that they had hastened his end by causing him anxieties which age has not strength to throw off; but they could not miss the reflection that the life now closed and finally sealed up might have been a much brighter life had they acted the part of dutiful, loving sons. Scarcely can one of our number pass from among us without leaving in our minds some self-reproach that we were not more kindly towards him, and that now he is beyond our kindness; that our opportunity for being brotherly towards *him* is for ever gone. And when we have very manifestly erred in this respect, perhaps there are among all the stings of a guilty conscience few more bitterly piercing than this. Many a son who has stood unmoved by the tears of a living mother—his mother by whom he lives, who has cherished him as her own soul, who has forgiven and forgiven and forgiven him, who has toiled and prayed, and watched for him—though he has hardened himself against her looks of imploring love and turned carelessly from her entreaties and burst through all the fond cords and snares by which she has sought to keep him, has yet broken down before the calm, unsolicitous, resting face of the dead. Hitherto he has not listened to her pleadings, and now she pleads no more. Hitherto

she has heard no word of pure love from him, and now she hears no more. Hitherto he has done nothing for her of all that a son may do, and now there is nothing he can do. All the goodness of her life gathers up and stands out at once, and the time for gratitude is past. He sees suddenly, as by the withdrawal of a veil, all that that worn body has passed through for him, and all the goodness these features have expressed, and now they can never light up with joyful acceptance of his love and duty. Such grief as this finds its one alleviation in the knowledge that we may follow those who have gone before us; that we may yet make reparation. And when we think how many we have let pass without those frank, human, kindly offices we might have rendered, the knowledge that we also shall be gathered to our people comes in as very cheering It is a grateful thought that there is a place where we shall be able to live rightly, where selfishness will not intrude and spoil all, but will leave us free to be to our neighbour all that we ought to be and all that we would be.

XXV.

JOSEPH'S DREAMS.

GENESIS xxxvii.

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee."—PSALM lxxvi. 10.

THE migration of Israel from Canaan to Egypt was a step of prime importance in the history. Great difficulties surrounded it, and very extraordinary means were used to bring it about. The preparatory steps occupied about twenty years, and nearly a fourth of the Book of Genesis is devoted to this period. This migration was a new idea. So little was it the result of an accidental dearth, or of any of those unforeseen calamities which cause families to emigrate from our own country, that God had forewarned Abraham himself that it must be. But only when it was becoming matter of actual experience and of history did God make known the precise object to be accomplished by it. This He makes known to Jacob as he passes from Canaan; and as, in abandoning the land he had so painfully won, his heart sinks, he is sustained by the assurance, "Fear not to go down into Egypt; I will there make thee a great nation."

The meaning of the step and the suitableness of the time and of the place to which Israel migrated, are apparent. For more than two hundred years now had Abraham and his descendants been wandering as

pilgrims, and as yet there were no signs of God's promise being kept to them. That promise had been of a land and of a seed. Great fecundity had been promised to the race; but instead of that there had been a remarkable and perplexing barrenness, so that after two centuries one tent could contain the whole male population. In Jacob's time the population began to increase, but just in proportion as this part of the promise showed signs of fulfilment did the other part seem precarious. For, in proportion to their increase, the family became hostile to the Canaanites, and how should they ever get past that critical point in their history at which they would be strong enough to excite the suspicion, jealousy, and hatred of the indigenous tribes, and yet not strong enough to defend themselves against this enmity? Their presence was tolerated, just as our countrymen tolerated the presence of French refugees, on the score of their impotence to do harm. They were placed in a quite anomalous position; a single family who had continued for two hundred years in a land which they could only seem in jest to call theirs, dwelling as guests amid the natives, maintaining peculiar forms of worship and customs. Collision with the inhabitants seemed unavoidable as soon as their real character and pretensions oozed out, and as soon as it seemed at all likely that they really proposed to become owners and masters in the land. And, in case of such collision, what could be the result, but that which has ever followed where a few score men, brave enough to be cut down where they stood, have been exposed to mass after mass of fierce and bloodthirsty barbarians? A small number of men have often made good their entrance into lands where the inhabitants greatly outnumbered them, but these have

commonly been highly disciplined troops, as in the case of the handful of Spaniards who seized Mexico and Peru; or they have been backed by a power which could aid with vast resources, as when the Romans held this country, or when the English lad in India left his pen on his desk and headed his few resolute countrymen, and held his own against unnumbered millions. It may be argued that if even Abraham with his own household swept Canaan clear of invaders, it might now have been possible for his grandson to do as much with increased means at his disposal. But, not to mention that every man has not the native genius for command and military enterprise which Abraham had, it must be taken into account that a force which is quite sufficient for a marauding expedition or a night attack, is inadequate for the exigencies of a campaign of several years' duration. The war which Jacob must have waged, had hostilities been opened, must have been a war of extermination, and such a war must have desolated the house of Israel if victorious, and, more probably by far, would have quite annihilated it.

It is to obviate these dangers, and to secure that Israel grow without let or hindrance, that Jacob's household is removed to a land where protection and seclusion would at once be secured to them. In the land of Goshen, secured from molestation partly by the influence of Joseph, but much more by the caste-prejudices of the Egyptians, and their hatred of all foreigners, and shepherds in particular, they enjoyed such prosperity and attained so rapidly the magnitude of a nation that some, forgetful alike of the promise of God and of the natural advantages of Israel's position, have refused to credit the accounts given us of the increase in their population. In a land so roomy, so

fertile, and so secluded as that in which they were now settled, they had every advantage for making the transition from a family to a nation. Here they were preserved from all temptation to mingle with neighbours of a different race, and so lose their special place as a people called out by God to stand alone. The Egyptians would have scorned the marriages which the Canaanites passionately solicited. Here the very contempt in which they were held proved to be their most valuable bulwark. And if Christians have any of the wisdom of the serpent, they will often find in the contempt or exclusiveness of worldly men a convenient barrier, preventing them, indeed, from enjoying some privileges, but at the same time enabling them, without molestation, to pursue their own way. I believe young people especially feel put about by the deprivations which they have to suffer in order to save their religious scruples; they are shut off from what their friends and associates enjoy, and they perceive that they are not so well liked as they would be had they less desire to live by conscience and by God's will. They feel ostracized, banished, frowned upon, laid under disabilities; but all this has its compensations: it forms for them a kind of Goshen where they may worship and increase, it runs a fence around them which keeps them apart from much that tempts and from much that enfeebles.

The residence of Israel in Egypt served another important purpose. By contact with the most civilised people of antiquity they emerged from the semi-barbarous condition in which they had previously been living. Going into Egypt mere shepherds, as Jacob somewhat plaintively and deprecatingly says to Pharaoh; not even possessed, so far as we know, of the funda-

mental arts on which civilisation rests, unable to record in writing the revelations God made, or to read them if recorded; having the most rudimentary ideas of law and justice, and having nothing to keep them together and give them form and strength, save the one idea that God meant to confer on them great distinction; they were transferred into a land where government had been so long established and law had come to be so thoroughly administered that life and property were as safe as among ourselves to-day, where science had made such advances that even the weather-beaten and time-stained relics of it seem to point to regions into which even the bold enterprise of modern investigation has not penetrated, and where all the arts needful for life were in familiar use, and even some practised which modern times have as yet been unable to recover. To no better school could the barbarous sons of Bilhah and Zilpah have been sent; to no more fitting discipline could the lawless spirits of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi have been subjected. In Egypt, where human life was sacred, where truth was worshipped as a deity, and where law was invested with the sanctity which belonged to what was supposed to have descended from heaven, they were brought under influences similar to those which ancient Rome exerted over conquered races.

The unwitting pioneer of this great movement was a man in all respects fitted to initiate it happily. In Joseph we meet a type of character rare in any race, and which, though occasionally reproduced in Jewish history, we should certainly not have expected to meet with at so early a period. For what chiefly strikes one in Joseph is a combination of grace and power, which is commonly looked upon as the peculiar result

of civilising influences, knowledge of history, familiarity with foreign races, and hereditary dignity. In David we find a similar flexibility and grace of character, and a similar personal superiority. We find the same bright and humorous disposition helping him to play the man in adverse circumstances; but we miss in David Joseph's self-control and incorruptible purity, as we also miss something of his capacity for difficult affairs of state. In Daniel this latter capacity is abundantly present, and a facility equal to Joseph's in dealing with foreigners, and there is also a certain grace or nobility in the Jewish Vizier; but Joseph had a surplus of power which enabled him to be cheerful and alert in doleful circumstances, which Daniel would certainly have borne manfully but probably in a sterner and more passive mood. Joseph, indeed, seemed to inherit and happily combine the highest qualities of his ancestors. He had Abraham's dignity and capacity, Isaac's purity and power of self-devotion, Jacob's cleverness and buoyancy and tenacity. From his mother's family he had personal beauty, humour, and management.

A young man of such capabilities could not long remain insensible to his own powers or indifferent to his own destiny. Indeed, the conduct of his father and brothers towards him must have made him self-conscious, even though he had been wholly innocent of introspection. The force of the impression he produced on his family may be measured by the circumstance that the princely dress given him by his father did not excite his brothers' ridicule but their envy and hatred. In this dress there was a manifest suitableness to his person, and this excited them to a keen resentment of the distinction. So too they felt

that his dreams were not the mere whimsicalities of a lively fancy, but were possessed of a verisimilitude which gave them importance. In short, the dress and the dreams were insufferably exasperating to the brothers, because they proclaimed and marked in a definite way the feeling of Joseph's superiority which had already been vaguely rankling in their consciousness. And it is creditable to Joseph that this superiority should first have emerged in connection with a point of conduct. It was in moral stature that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah felt that they were outgrown by the stripling whom they carried with them as their drudge. Neither are we obliged to suppose that Joseph was a gratuitous tale-bearer, or that when he carried their evil report to his father he was actuated by a prudish, censorious, or in any way unworthy spirit. That he very well knew how to hold his tongue no man ever gave more adequate proof; but he that understands that there is a time to keep silence necessarily sees also that there is a time to speak. And no one can tell what torture that pure young soul may have endured in the remote pastures, when left alone to withstand day after day the outrage of these coarse and unscrupulous men. An elder brother, if he will, can more effectually guard the innocence of a younger brother than any other relative can, but he can also inflict a more exquisite torture.

Joseph, then, could not but come to think of his future and of his destiny in this family. That his father should make a pet of him rather than of Benjamin, he would refer to the circumstance that he was the oldest son of the wife of his choice, of her whom first he had loved, and who had no rival while he lived. To so charming a companion as Joseph must

always have been, Jacob would naturally impart all the traditions and hopes of the family. In him he found a sympathetic and appreciative listener, who wiled him on to endless narrative, and whose imaginativeness quickened his own hopes and made the future seem grander and the world more wide. And what Jacob had to tell could fall into no kindlier soil than the opening mind of Joseph. No hint was lost, every promise was interpreted by some waiting aspiration. And thus, like every youth of capacity, he came to have his day-dreams. These day-dreams, though derided by those who cannot see the Cæsar in the careless trifler, and though often awkward and even offensive in their expression, are not always the mere discontented cravings of youthful vanity, but are frequently instinctive gropings towards the position which the nature is fitted to fill. "Our wishes," it has been said, "are the forefeeling of our capabilities;" and certainly where there is any special gift or genius in a man, the wish of his youth is predictive of the attainment of manhood. Whims, no doubt, there are, passing phases through which natural growth carries us, flutterings of the needle when too near some powerful influence; yet amidst all variations the true direction will be discernible and ultimately will be dominant. And it is a great art to discover what we are fit for, so that we may settle down to our own work, or patiently wait for our own place, without enviously striving to rob every other man of his crown and so losing our own. It is an art that saves us much fretting and disappointment and waste of time, to understand early in life what it is we can accomplish, and what precisely we mean to be at; "to recognise in our personal gifts or station, in the circumstances and complications of our

life, in our relations to others, or to the world—the will of God teaching us what we are, and for what we ought to live." How much of life often is gone before its possessor sees the use he can put it to, and ceases to beat the air! How much of life is an ill-considered but passionate striving after what can never be attained, or a vain imitation of persons who have quite different talents and opportunities from ourselves, and who are therefore set to quite another work than ours.

It was because Joseph's dreams embodied his waking ambition that they were of importance. Dreams become significant when they are the concentrated essence of the main stream of the waking thoughts, and picturesquely exhibit the tendency of the character. "In a dream," says Elihu, "in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose." This is precisely the use of dreams: our tendencies, unbridled by reason and fact, run on to results; the purposes which the business and other good influences of the day have kept down act themselves out in our dreams, and we see the character unimpeded by social checks, and as it would be were it unmodified by the restraints and efforts and external considerations of our conscious hours. Our vanity, our pride, our malice, our impurity, our deceit, our every evil passion, has free play, and shows us its finished result, and in so vivid and true though caricatured a form that we are startled and withdrawn from our purpose. The evil thought we have suffered to creep about our heart seems in our dreams to become a deed, and we wake in horror and thank God we can yet refrain. Thus the poor woman, who in utter destitution

was beginning to find her child a burden, dreamt she had drowned it, and woke in horror at the fancied sound of the plunge—woke to clasp her little one to her breast with the thrill of a grateful affection that never again gave way. So that while no man is so foolish as to expect instruction from every dream any more than from every thought that visits his waking mind, yet every one who has been accumulating some knowledge of himself is aware that he has drawn a large part of this from his unconscious hours. As the naturalist would know but a small part of the animal kingdom by studying the creatures that show themselves in the daylight, so there are moles and bats of the spirit that exhibit themselves most freely in the darkness; and there are jungles and waste places in the character which, if you look on them only in the sunshine, may seem safe and lovely, but which at night show themselves to be full of all loathsome and savage beasts.

With the simplicity of a guileless mind, and with the natural proneness of members of one family to tell in the morning the dreams they have had, Joseph tells to the rest what seems to himself interesting, if not very suggestive. Possibly he thought very little of his dream till he saw how much importance his brothers attached to it. Possibly there might be discernible in his tone and look some mixture of youthful arrogance. And in his relation of the second dream, there was discernible at least a confidence that it would be realised, which was peculiarly intolerable to his brothers, and to his father seemed a dangerous symptom that called for rebuke. And yet "his father observed the saying;" as a parent has sometimes occasion to check his child, and yet, having done so, feels that that

does not end the matter; that his boy and he are in somewhat different spheres, so that while he was certainly justified in punishing such and such a manifestation of his character, there is yet something behind that he does not quite understand, and for which possibly punishment may not be exactly the suitable award.

We fall into Jacob's mistake when we refuse to acknowledge as genuine and God-inspired any religious experience which we ourselves have not passed through, and which appears in a guise that is not only unfamiliar, but that is in some particulars objectionable. Up to the measure of our own religious experience, we recognise as genuine, and sympathise with, the parallel experience of others; but when they rise above us and get beyond us, we begin to speak of them as visionaries, enthusiasts, dreamers. We content ourselves with pointing again and again to the blots in their manner, and refuse to read the future through the ideas they add to our knowledge. But the future necessarily lies, not in the definite and finished attainment, but in the indefinite and hazy and dream-like germs that have yet growth in them. The future is not with Jacob, the rebuker, but with the dreaming, and, possibly, somewhat offensive Joseph. It was certainly a new element Joseph introduced into the experience of God's people. He saw, obscurely indeed, but with sufficient clearness to make him thoughtful, that the man whom God chooses and makes a blessing to others is so far advanced above his fellows that they lean upon him and pay him homage as if he were in the place of God to them. He saw that his higher powers were to be used for his brethren, and that the high destiny he smoehow felt to be his was to be won by doing serivce

so essential that his family would bow before him and give themselves into his hand. He saw this, as every man whose love keeps pace with his talent sees it, and he so far anticipated the dignity of Him who, in the deepest self-sacrifice, assumed a position and asserted claims which enraged His brethren and made even His believing mother marvel. Joseph knew that the welfare of his family rested not with the Esau-like good-nature of Reuben, still less with the fanatical ferocity of Simeon and Levi, not with the servile patience of Issachar, nor with the natural force and dignity of Judah, but with some deeper qualities which, if he himself did not yet possess, he at least valued and aspired to.

Whatever Joseph thought of the path by which he was to reach the high dignity which his dreams foreshadowed, he was soon to learn that the path was neither easy nor short. Each man thinks that, for himself at least, an exceptional path will be broken out, and that without difficulties and humiliations he will inherit the kingdom. But it cannot be so. And as the first step a lad takes towards the attainment of his position often involves him in trouble and covers him with confusion, and does so even although he ultimately finds that it was the only path by which he could have reached his goal; so, that which was really the first step towards Joseph's high destiny, no doubt seemed to him most calamitous and fatal. It certainly did so to his brothers, who thought that they were effectually and for ever putting an end to Joseph's pretensions. "Behold, this dreamer cometh; come now therefore, and let us slay him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." They were, however, so far turned from their purpose by Reuben as to put him in a pit, meaning to leave him to die; and, doubtless, they

thought themselves lenient in doing so. The less violent the death inflicted, the less of murder seems to be in it; so that he who slowly kills the body by only wounding the affections often counts himself no murderer at all, because he strikes no blood-shedding blow, and can deceive himself into the idea that it is the working of his victim's own spirit that is doing the damage.

The tank into which Joseph's brethren cast him was apparently one of those huge reservoirs excavated by shepherds in the East, that they may have a supply of water for their flocks in the end of the dry season, when the running waters fail them. Being so narrow at the mouth that they can be covered by a single stone, they gradually widen and form a large subterranean room; and the facility they thus afford for the confinement of prisoners was from the first too obvious not to be commonly taken advantage of. In such a place was Joseph left to die: under the ground, sinking in mire, his flesh creeping at the touch of unseen slimy creatures, in darkness, alone; that is to say, in a species of confinement which tames the most reckless and maddens the best balanced spirits, which shakes the nerve of the calmest, and has sometimes left the blankness of idiocy in masculine understandings. A few wild cries that ring painfully round his prison show him he need expect no help from without; a few wild and desperate beatings round the shelving walls of rock show him there is no possibility of escape; he covers his face, or casts himself on the floor of his dungeon to escape within himself, but only to find this also in vain, and to rise and renew efforts he knows to be fruitless. Here, then, is what has come of his fine dreams. With shame he now remembers the beaming

confidence with which he had related them; with bitterness he thinks of the bright life above him, from which these few feet cut him so absolutely off, and of the quick termination that has been put to all his hopes.

Into such tanks do young persons especially get cast; finding themselves suddenly dropped out of the lively scenery and bright sunshine in which they have been living, down into roomy graves where they seem left to die at leisure. They had conceived a way of being useful in the world; they had found an aim or a hope; they had, like Joseph, discerned their place and were making towards it, when suddenly they seem to be thrown out and are left to learn that the world can do very well without them, that the sun and moon and the eleven stars do not drop from their courses or make wail because of their sad condition. High aims and commendable purposes are not so easily fulfilled as they fancied. The faculty and desire in them to be of service are not recognised. Men do not make room for them, and God seems to disregard the hopes He has excited in them. The little attempt at living they have made seems only to have got themselves and others into trouble. They begin to think it a mistake their being in the world at all; they curse the day of their birth. Others are enjoying this life, and seem to be making something of it, having found work that suits and develops them; but, for their own part, they cannot get fitted into life at any point, and are excluded from the onward movement of the world. They are again and again flung back, until they fear they are not to see the fulfilment of any one bright dream that has ever visited them, and that they are never, never at all, to live out the life it is in them to live, or find light

and scope for maturing those germs of the rich human nature that they feel within them.

All this is in the way to attainment. This or that check, this long burial for years, does not come upon you merely because stoppage and hindrance have been useful to others, but because your advancement lies through these experiences. Young persons naturally feel strongly that life is all before them, that this life is, in the first place, their concern, and that God must be proved sufficient for this life, able to bring them to their ideal. And the first lesson they have to learn is, that mere youthful confidence and energy are not the qualities that overcome the world. They have to learn that humility, and the ambition that seeks great things, but not for ourselves, are the qualities really indispensable. But do men become humble by being told to become so, or by knowing they ought to be so? God must make us humble by the actual experience we meet with in our ordinary life. Joseph, no doubt, knew very well, what his aged grandfather must often have told him, that a man must die before he begins to live. But what could an ambitious, happy youth make of this, till he was thrown into the pit and left there? as truly passing through the bitterness of death as Isaac had passed through it, and as keenly feeling the pain of severance from the light of life. Then, no doubt, he thought of Isaac, and of Isaac's God, till between himself and the impenetrable dungeon-walls the everlasting arms seemed to interpose, and through the darkness of his death-like solitude the face of Jacob's God appeared to beam upon him, and he came to feel what we must, by some extremity, all be made to feel, that it was not in this world's life but in God he lived, that nothing could befall him which God did

not will, and that what God had for him to do, God would enable him to do.

The heartless barbarity with which the brethren of Joseph sat down to eat and drink the very dainties he had brought them from his father, while they left him, as they thought, to starve, has been regarded by all later generations as the height of hard-hearted indifference. Amos, at a loss to describe the recklessness of his own generation, falls back upon this incident, and cries woe upon those "that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointment, but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." We reflect, if we do not substantially reproduce, their sin when we are filled with animosity against those who usher in some higher kind of life, effort, or worship, than we ourselves as yet desire or are fit for, and which, therefore, reflects shame on our incapacity; and when we would fain, without using violence, get rid of such persons. There are often schemes set on foot by better men than ourselves, against which somehow our spirit rises, yet which, did we consider, we should at the most say with the cautious Gamaliel, Let us beware of doing anything to hinder this, let us see whether, perchance, it be not of God. Sometimes there are in families individuals who do not get the encouragement in well-doing they might expect in a Christian family, but are rather frowned upon and hindered by the other members of it, because they seem to be inaugurating a higher style of religion than the family is used to, and to be reflecting from their own conduct a condemnation of what has hitherto been current.

This treatment, who among us has not extended to Him who in His whole experience so closely resembles Joseph? So long as Christ is to us merely, as it were,

the pet of the family, the innocent, guileless, loving Being on whom we can heap pretty epithets, and in whom we find play for our best affections, to whom it is easier to show ourselves affectionate and well-disposed than to the brothers who mingle with us in all our pursuits; so long as He remains to us as a child whose demands it is a relaxation to fulfil, we fancy that we are giving Him our hearts, and that He, if any, has our love. But when He declares to us His dreams, and claims to be our Lord, to whom with most absolute homage we must bow, who has a right to rule and means to rule over us, who will have His will done by us and not our own, then the love we fancied seems to pass into something like aversion. His purposes we would fain believe to be the idle fancies of a dreamer which He Himself does not expect us to pay much heed to. And if we do not resent the absolute surrender of ourselves to Him which He demands, if the bowing down of our fullest sheaves and brightest glory to Him is too little understood by us to be resented; if we think such dreams are not to come true, and that He does not mean much by demanding our homage, and therefore do not resent the demand; yet possibly we can remember with shame how we have "anointed ourselves with the chief ointment," lain listlessly enjoying some of those luxuries which our Brother has brought us from the Father's house, and yet let Himself and His cause be buried out of sight—enjoyed the good name of Christian, the pleasant social refinements of a Christian land, even the peace of conscience which the knowledge of the Christian's God produces, and yet turned away from the deeper emotions which His personal entreaties stir, and from those self-sacrificing efforts which His cause requires if it is to prosper.

There are, too, unstable Reubens still, whom something always draws aside, and who are ever out of the way when most needed; who, like him, are on the other side of the hill when Christ's cause is being betrayed; who still count their own private business that which must be done, and God's work that which may be done—work for themselves necessary, and God's work only voluntary and in the second place. And there are also those who, though they would be honestly shocked to be charged with murdering Christ's cause, can yet leave it to perish.

XXVI.

JOSEPH IN PRISON.

GENESIS xxxix.

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life."—JAMES i. 12.

DRAMATISTS and novelists who make it their business to give accurate representations of human life, proceed upon the understanding that there is a plot in it, and that if you take the beginning or middle without the end, you must fail to comprehend these prior parts. And a plot is pronounced good in proportion as, without violating truth to nature, it brings the leading characters into situations of extreme danger or distress, from which there seems no possible exit, and in which the characters themselves may have fullest opportunity to display and ripen their individual excellences. A life is judged poor and without significance, certainly unworthy of any longer record than a monumental epitaph may contain, if there be in it no critical passages, no emergencies when all anticipation of the next step is baffled, or when ruin seems certain. Though it has been brought to a successful issue, yet, to make it worthy of our consideration, it must have been brought to this issue through hazard, through opposition, contrary to many expectations that were plausibly entertained at the several stages of its career

All men, in short, are agreed that the value of a human life consists very much in the hazards and conflicts through which it is carried; and yet we resent God's dealing with us when it comes to be our turn to play the hero, and by patient endurance and righteous endeavour to bring our lives to a successful issue. How flat and tame would this narrative have read had Joseph by easy steps come to the dignity he at last reached through a series of misadventures that called out and ripened all that was manly and strong and tender in his character. And take out of your own life all your difficulties, all that ever pained, agitated, depressed you, all that disappointed or postponed your expectations, all that suddenly called upon you to act in trying situations, all that thoroughly put you to the proof—take all this away, and what do you leave, but a blank insipid life that not even yourself can see any interest in?

And when we speak of Joseph's life as typical, we mean that it illustrates on a great scale and in picturesque and memorable situations principles which are obscurely operative in our own experience. It pleases the fancy to trace the incidental analogies between the life of Joseph and that of our Lord. As our Lord, so Joseph was the beloved of his father, sent by him to visit his brethren, and see after their well-being, seized and sold by them to strangers, and thus raised to be their Saviour and the Saviour of the world. Joseph in prison pronouncing the doom of one of his fellow-prisoners and the exaltation of the other, suggests the scene on Calvary where the one fellow-sufferer was taken, the other left. Joseph's contemporaries had of course no idea that his life foreshadowed the life of the Redeemer, yet they must have seen, or ought to have

seen, that the deepest humiliation is often the path to the highest exaltation, that the deliverer sent by God to save a people may come in the guise of a slave, and that false accusations, imprisonment, years of suffering, do not make it impossible nor even unlikely that he who endures all these may be God's chosen Son.

In Joseph's being lifted out of the pit only to pass into slavery, many a man of Joseph's years has seen a picture of what has happened to himself. From a position in which they have been as if buried alive, young men not uncommonly emerge into a position preferable certainly to that out of which they have been brought, but in which they are compelled to work beyond their strength, and *that* for some superior in whom they have no special interest. Grinding toil, and often cruel insult, are their portion; and no necklace heavy with tokens of honour that afterwards may be allotted them can ever quite hide the scars made by the iron collar of the slave. One need not pity them over much, for they are young and have a whole life-time of energy and power of resistance in their spirit. And yet they will often call themselves slaves, and complain that all the fruit of their labour passes over to others and away from themselves, and all prospect of the fulfilment of their former dreams is quite cut off. That which haunts their heart by day and by night, that which they seem destined and fit for, they never get time nor liberty to work out and attain. They are never viewed as proprietors of themselves, who may possibly have interests of their own and hopes of their own.

In Joseph's case there were many aggravations of the soreness of such a condition. He had not one friend in the country. He had no knowledge of the language,

no knowledge of any trade that could make him valuable in Egypt—nothing, in short, but his own manhood and his faith in God. His introduction to Egypt was of the most dispiriting kind. What could he expect from strangers, if his own brothers had found him so obnoxious? Now when a man is thus galled and stung by injury, and has learned how little he can depend upon finding good faith and common justice in the world, his character will show itself in the attitude he assumes towards men and towards life generally. A weak nature, when it finds itself thus deceived and injured, will sullenly surrender all expectation of good, and will vent its spleen on the world by angry denunciations of the heartless and ungrateful ways of men. A proud nature will gather itself up from every blow, and determinedly work its way to an adequate revenge. A mean nature will accept its fate, and while it indulges in cynical and spiteful observations on human life, will greedily accept the paltriest rewards it can secure. But the supreme healthiness of Joseph's nature resists all the infectious influences that emanate from the world around him, and preserves him from every kind of morbid attitude towards the world and life. So easily did he throw off all vain regrets and stifle all vindictive and morbid feelings, so readily did he adjust himself to and so heartily enter into life as it presented itself to him, that he speedily rose to be overseer in the house of Potiphar. His capacity for business, his genial power of devoting himself to other men's interests, his clear integrity, were such, that this officer of Pharaoh's could find no more trustworthy servant in all Egypt—"he left all that he had in Joseph's hand: and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat."

Thus Joseph passed safely through a critical period

of his life—the period during which men assume the attitude towards life and their fellow-men which they commonly retain throughout. Too often we accept the weapons with which the world challenges us, and seek to force our way by means little more commendable than the injustice and coldness we ourselves resent. Joseph gives the first great evidence of moral strength by rising superior to this temptation, to which almost all men in one degree or other succumb. You can hear him saying, deep down in his heart and almost unconsciously to himself: If the world is full of hatred, there is all the more need that at least one man should forgive and love; if men's hearts are black with selfishness, ambition, and lust, all the more reason for me to be pure and to do my best for all whom my service can reach; if cruelty, lying, and fraud meet me at every step, all the more am I called to conquer these by integrity and guilelessness.

His capacity, then, and power of governing others, were no longer dreams of his own, but qualities with which he was accredited by those who judged dispassionately and from the bare actual results. But this recognition and promotion brought with it serious temptation. So capable a person was he that a year or two had brought him to the highest post he could expect as a slave. His advancement, therefore, only brought his actual attainment into more painful contrast with the attainment of his dreams. As this sense of disappointment becomes more familiar to his heart, and threatens, under the monotonous routine of his household work, to deepen into a habit, there suddenly opens to him a new and unthought-of path to high position. An intrigue with Potiphar's wife might lead to the very advancement he sought. It might lift him

out of the condition of a slave. It may have been known to him that other men had not scrupled so to promote their own interests. Besides, Joseph was young, and a nature like his, lively and sympathetic, must have felt deeply that in his position he was not likely to meet such a woman as could command his cordial love. That the temptation was in any degree to the sensual side of his nature there is no evidence whatever. For all that the narrative says, Potiphar's wife may not have been attractive in person. She *may* have been; and as she used persistently, "day by day," every art and wile by which she could lure Joseph to her mind, in some of his moods and under such circumstances as she would study to arrange he may have felt even this element of the temptation. But it is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only what is sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also two much deeper-lying tendencies—the craving for loving recognition, and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion. The latter tendency may not seem dangerous, but I am sure that if an analysis could be made of the broken hearts and shame-crushed lives around us, it would be found that a large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry. Men of masculine make are prone to show their regard for women. This regard, when genuine and manly, will show itself in purity of sympathy and respectful attention. But when this regard is debased by a desire to please and ingratiate oneself, men are precipitated into the unseemly expressions of a spurious manhood. The other craving—the craving for love—acts also in a somewhat latent way. It is this craving which drives men to seek to satisfy

themselves with the expressions of love, as if thus they could secure love itself. They do not distinguish between the two; they do not recognise that what they most deeply desire is love, rather than the expression of it; and they awake to find that precisely in so far as they have accepted the expression without the sentiment, in so far have they put love itself beyond their reach.

This temptation was, in Joseph's case, aggravated by his being in a foreign country, unrestrained by the expectations of his own family, or by the eye of those he loved. He had, however, that which restrained him, and made the sin seem to him an impossible wickedness, the thought of which he could not, for a moment, entertain. "Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; there is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Gratitude to the man who had pitied him in the slave market, and shown a generous confidence in a comparative stranger, was, with Joseph, a stronger sentiment than any that Potiphar's wife could stir in him. One can well believe it. We know what enthusiastic devotedness a young man of any worth delights to give to his superior who has treated him with justice, generosity, and confidence; who himself occupies a station of importance in public life; and who, by a dignified graciousness of demeanour, can make even the slave feel that he too is a man, and that through his slave's dress his proper manhood and worth are recognised. There are few stronger sentiments than the enthusiasm or quiet fidelity that can thus be kindled, and the influence such a superior wields over the young

mind is paramount. To disregard the rights of his master seemed to Joseph a great wickedness and sin against God. The treachery of the sin strikes him; his native discernment of the true rights of every party in the case cannot, for a moment, be hoodwinked. He is not a man who can, even in the excitement of temptation, overlook the consequences his sin may have on others. Not unsteadied by the flattering solicitations of one so much above him in rank, nor sullied by the contagion of her vehement passion; neither afraid to incur the resentment of one who so regarded him, nor kindled to any impure desire by contact with her blazing lust; neither scrupling thoroughly to disappoint her in himself, nor to make her feel her own great guilt, he flung from him the strong inducements that seemed to net him round and entangle him as his garment did, and tore himself, shocked and grieved, from the beseeching hand of his temptress.

The incident is related not because it was the most violent temptation to which Joseph was ever exposed, but because it formed a necessary link in the chain of circumstances that brought him before Pharaoh. And however strong this temptation may have been, more men would be found who could thus have spoken to Potiphar's wife than who could have kept silence when accused by Potiphar. For his purity you will find his equal, one among a thousand; for his mercy scarcely one. For there is nothing more intensely trying than to live under false and painful accusations, which totally misrepresent and damage your character, which effectually bar your advancement, and which yet you have it in your power to disprove. Joseph, feeling his indebtedness to Potiphar, contents himself with the simple averment that he himself is innocent. The word

is on his tongue that can put a very different face on the matter, but rather than utter that word, Joseph will suffer the stroke that otherwise must fall on his master's honour; will pass from his high place and office of trust, through the jeering or possibly compassionating slaves, branded as one who has betrayed the frankest confidence, and is fitter for the dungeon than the stewardship of Potiphar. He is content to lie under the cruel suspicion that he had in the foulest way wronged the man whom most he should have regarded, and whom in point of fact he did enthusiastically serve. There was one man in Egypt whose good-will he prized, and this man now scorned and condemned him, and this for the very act by which Joseph had proved most faithful and deserving.

And even after a long imprisonment, when he had now no reputation to maintain, and when such a little bit of court scandal as he could have retailed would have been highly palatable and possibly useful to some of those polished ruffians and adventurers who made their dungeon ring with questionable tales, and with whom the free and levelling intercourse of prison life had put him on the most familiar footing, and when they twitted and taunted him with his supposed crime, and gave him the prison sobriquet that would most pungently embody his villainy and failure, and when it might plausibly have been pleaded by himself that such a woman should be exposed, Joseph uttered no word of recrimination, but quietly endured, knowing that God's providence could allow him to be merciful; protesting, when needful, that he himself was innocent, but seeking to entangle no one else in his misfortune.

It is this that has made the world seem so terrible a place to many—that the innocent must so often suffer

for the guilty, and that, without appeal, the pure and loving must lie in chains and bitterness, while the wicked live and see good days. It is this that has made men most despairingly question whether there be indeed a God in heaven Who knows who the real culprit is, and yet suffers a terrible doom slowly to close around the innocent; Who sees where the guilt lies, and yet moves no finger nor speaks the word that would bring justice to light, shaming the secure triumph of the wrongdoer, and saving the bleeding spirit from its agony. It was this that came as the last stroke of the passion of our Lord, that He was numbered among the transgressors; it was this that caused or materially increased the feeling that God had deserted Him; and it was this that wrung from Him the cry which once was wrung from David, and may well have been wrung from Joseph, when, cast into the dungeon as a mean and treacherous villain, whose freedom was the peril of domestic peace and honour, he found himself again helpless and forlorn, regarded now not as a mere worthless lad, but as a criminal of the lowest type. And as there always recur cases in which exculpation is impossible just in proportion as the party accused is possessed of honourable feeling, and where silent acceptance of doom is the result not of convicted guilt, but of the very triumph of self-sacrifice, we must beware of over-suspicion and injustice. There is nothing in which we are more frequently mistaken than in our suspicions and harsh judgments of others.

"But the Lord was with Joseph, and allowed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison." As in Potiphar's house, so in the king's house of detention, Joseph's fidelity and serviceableness made him seem indispensable, and by sheer force of

character he occupied the place rather of governor than of prisoner. The discerning men he had to do with, accustomed to deal with criminals and suspects of all shades, very quickly perceived that in Joseph's case justice was at fault, and that he was a mere scape-goat. Well might Potiphar's wife, like Pilate's, have had warning dreams regarding the innocent person who was being condemned; and probably Potiphar himself had suspicion enough of the true state of matters to prevent him from going to extremities with Joseph, and so to imprison him more out of deference to the opinion of his household, and for the sake of appearances, than because Joseph alone was the object of his anger. At any rate, such was the vitality of Joseph's confidence in God, and such was the light-heartedness that sprang from his integrity of conscience, that he was free from all absorbing anxiety about himself, and had leisure to amuse and help his fellow-prisoners, so that such promotion as a gaol could afford he won, from a dungeon to a chain, from a chain to his word of honour. Thus even in the unlatticed dungeon the sun and moon look in upon him and bow to him; and while his sheaf seems at its poorest, all rust and mildew, the sheaves of his masters do homage.

After the arrival of two such notable criminals as the chief butler and baker of Pharaoh—the chamberlain and steward of the royal household—Joseph, if sometimes pensive, must yet have had sufficient entertainment at times in conversing with men who stood by the king, and were familiar with the statesmen, courtiers, and military men who frequented the house of Potiphar. He had now ample opportunity for acquiring information which afterwards stood him in good stead, for apprehending the character of Pharaoh, and for making

himself acquainted with many details of his government, and with the general condition of the people. Officials in disgrace would be found much more accessible and much more communicative of important information than officials in court favour could have been to one in Joseph's position.

It is not surprising that three nights before Pharaoh's birthday these functionaries of the court should have recalled in sleep such scenes as that day was wont to bring round, nor that they should vividly have seen the parts they themselves used to play in the festival. Neither is it surprising that they should have had very anxious thoughts regarding their own fate on a day which was chosen for deciding the fate of political or courtly offenders. But it is remarkable that they having dreamed these dreams Joseph should have been found willing to interpret them. One desires some evidence of Joseph's attitude towards God during this period when God's attitude towards him might seem doubtful, and especially one would like to know what Joseph by this time thought of his juvenile dreams, and whether in the prison his face wore the same beaming confidence in his own future which had smitten the hearts of his brothers with impatient envy of the dreamer. We seek some evidence, and here we find it. Joseph's willingness to interpret the dreams of his fellow-prisoners proves that he still believed in his own, that among his other qualities he had this characteristic also of a steadfast and profound soul, that he "reverenced as a man the dreams of his youth." Had he not done so, and had he not yet hoped that somehow God would bring truth out of them, he would surely have said: Don't you believe in dreams; they will only get you into difficulties. He would have said what some

of us could dictate from our own thoughts: I won't meddle with dreams any more; I am not so young as I once was; doctrines and principles that served for fervent romantic youth seem puerile now, when I have learned what human life actually is; I can't ask this man, who knows the world and has held the cup for Pharaoh, and is aware what a practical shape the king's anger takes, to cherish hopes similar to those which often seem so remote and doubtful to myself. My religion has brought me into trouble: it has lost me my situation, it has kept me poor, it has made me despised, it has debarred me from enjoyment. Can I ask this man to trust to inward whisperings which seem to have so misled me? No, no; let every man bear his own burden. If he wishes to become religious, let not me bear the responsibility. If he will dream, let him find some other interpreter.

This casual conversation, then, with his fellow-prisoners was for Joseph one of those perilous moments when a man holds his fate in his hand, and yet does not know that he is specially on trial, but has for his guidance and safe-conduct through the hazard only the ordinary safeguards and lights by the aid of which he is framing his daily life. A man cannot be forewarned of trial, if the trial is to be a fair test of his habitual life. He must not be called to the lists by the herald's trumpet warning him to mind his seat and grasp his weapon; but must be suddenly set upon if his habit of steadiness and balance is to be tested, and the warrior-instinct to which the right weapon is ever at hand. As Joseph, going the round of his morning duty and spreading what might stir the appetite of these dainty courtiers, noted the gloom on their faces, had he not been of a nature to take upon himself the sorrows of

others, he might have been glad to escape from their presence, fearful lest he should be infected by their depression, or should become an object on which they might vent their ill-humour. But he was girt with a healthy cheerfulness that could bear more than his own burden; and his pondering of his own experience made him sensitive to all that affected the destinies of other men.

Thus Joseph in becoming the interpreter of the dreams of other men became the fulfiller of his own. Had he made light of the dreams of his fellow-prisoners because he had already made light of his own, he would, for aught we can see, have died in the dungeon. And, indeed, what hope is left for a man, and what deliverance is possible, when he makes light of his own most sacred experience, and doubts whether after all there was any Divine voice in that part of his life which once he felt to be full of significance? Sadness, cynical worldliness, irritability, sour and isolating selfishness, rapid deterioration in every part of the character—these are the results which follow our repudiation of past experience and denial of truth that once animated and purified us; when, at least, this repudiation and denial are not themselves the results of our advance to a higher, more animating, and more purifying truth. We cannot but leave behind us many "childish things," beliefs that we now recognise as mere superstitions, hopes and fears which do not move the maturer mind; we cannot but seek always to be stripping ourselves of modes of thinking which have served their purpose and are out of date, but we do so only for the sake of attaining freer movement in all serviceable and righteous conduct, and more adequate covering for the permanent weaknesses of our own nature—"not for

that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon," that truth partial and dawning may be swallowed up in the perfect light of noon. And when a supposed advance in the knowledge of things spiritual robs us of all that sustains true spiritual life in us, and begets an angry contempt of our own past experience and a proud scorning of the dreams that agitate other men; when it ministers not at all to the growth in us of what is tender and pure and loving and progressive, but hardens us to a sullen or coarsely riotous or coldly calculating character, we cannot but question whether it is not a delusion rather than a truth that has taken possession of us.

If it is fanciful, it is yet almost inevitable, to compare Joseph at this stage of his career to the great Interpreter who stands between God and us, and makes all His signs intelligible. Those Egyptians could not forbear honouring Joseph, who was able to solve to them the mysteries on the borders of which the Egyptian mind continually hovered, and which it symbolized by its mysterious sphinxes, its strange chambers of imagery, its unapproachable divinities. And we bow before the Lord Jesus Christ, because He can read our fate and unriddle all our dim anticipations of good and evil, and make intelligible to us the visions of our own hearts. There is that in us, as in these men, from which a skilled eye could already read our destiny. In the eye of One who sees the end from the beginning, and can distinguish between the determining influences of character and the insignificant manifestations of a passing mood, we are already designed to our eternal places. And it is in Christ alone your future is explained. You cannot understand your future without taking Him into your confidence. You go forward

blindly to meet you know not what, unless you listen to His interpretation of the vague presentiments that visit you. Without Him what can we make of those suspicions of a future judgment, or of those yearnings after God, that hang about our hearts? Without Him what can we make of the idea and hope of a better life than we are now living, or of the strange persuasion that all will yet be well—a persuasion that seems so groundless, and which yet will not be shaken off, but finds its explanation in Christ? The excess of side light that falls across our path from the present seems only to make the future more obscure and doubtful, and from Him alone do we receive any interpretation of ourselves that even seems to be satisfying. Our fellow-prisoners are often seen to be so absorbed in their own affairs that it is vain to seek light from them; but He, with patient, self-forgetting friendliness, is ever disengaged, and even elicits, by the kindly and interrogating attitude He takes towards us, the utterance of all our woes and perplexities. And it is because He has had dreams Himself that He has become so skilled an interpreter of ours. It is because in His own life He had His mind hard pressed for a solution of those very problems which baffle us, because He had for Himself to adjust God's promise to the ordinary and apparently casual and untoward incidents of a human life, and because He had to wait long before it became quite clear how one Scripture after another was to be fulfilled by a course of simple confiding obedience —it is because of this experience of His own, that He can now enter into and rightly guide to its goal every longing we cherish.

XXVII.

PHARAOH'S DREAMS.

GENESIS xli.

"Thus saith the Lord, that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that confirmeth the word of His servant, and performeth the counsel of His messengers: that saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure."—ISA. xliv. 25, 28.

THE preceding act in this great drama—the act comprising the scenes of Joseph's temptation, unjust imprisonment, and interpretation of his fellow-prisoners' dreams—was written for the sake of explaining how Joseph came to be introduced to Pharaoh. Other friendships may have been formed in the prison, and other threads may have been spun which went to make up the life of Joseph, but this only is pursued. For a time, however, there seemed very little prospect that this would prove to be the thread on which his destiny hung. Joseph made a touching appeal to the Chief Butler: "yet did not the Chief Butler remember Joseph, but forgat him." You can see him in the joy of his release affectionately pressing Joseph's hand as the king's messengers knocked off his fetters. You can see him assuring Joseph, by his farewell look, that he might trust him; mistaking mere elation at his own release for warmth of feeling towards Joseph, though perhaps even already feeling just the slightest touch

of awkwardness at being seen on such intimate terms with a Hebrew slave. How could he, when in the palace of Pharaoh and decorated with the insignia of his office and surrounded by courtiers, break through the formal etiquette of the place? What with the pleasant congratulations of old friends, and the accumulation of business since he had been imprisoned, and the excitement of restoration from so low and hopeless to so high and busy a position, the promise to Joseph is obliterated from his mind. If it once or twice recurs to his memory, he persuades himself he is waiting for a good opening to mention Joseph. It would perhaps be unwarrantable to say that he admits the idea that he is in no way indebted to Joseph, since all that Joseph had done was to interpret, but by no means to determine, his fate.

The analogy which we could not help seeing between Joseph's relation to his fellow-prisoners, and our Lord's relation to us, pursues us here. For does not the bond between us and Him seem often very slender, when once we have received from Him the knowledge of the King's good-will, and find ourselves set in a place of security? Is not Christ with many a mere stepping-stone for their own advancement, and of interest only so long as they are in anxiety about their own fate? Their regard for Him seems abruptly to terminate as soon as they are ushered to freer air. Brought for a while into contact with Him, the very peace and prosperity which that intercourse has introduced them to become opiates to dull their memory and their gratitude. They have received all they at present desire, they have no more dreams, their life has become so plain and simple and glad that they need no interpreter. They seem to regard Him no more than

an official is regarded who is set to discharge to all comers some duty for which he is paid ; who mingles no love with his work, and from whom they would receive the same benefits whether he had any personal interest in them or no. But there is no Christianity where there is no loving remembrance of Christ. If your contact with Him has not made Him your Friend whom you can by no possibility forget, you have missed the best result of your introduction to Him. It makes one think meanly of the Chief Butler that such a personality as Joseph's had not more deeply impressed him—that everything he heard and saw among the courtiers did not make him say to himself: There is a friend of mine, in prison hard by, that for beauty, wisdom, and vivacity would more than match the finest of you all. And it says very little for us if we can have known anything of Christ without seeing that in Him we have what is nowhere else, and without finding that He has become the necessity of our life to whom we turn at every point.

But, as things turned out, it was perhaps as well for Joseph that his promising friend did forget him. For, supposing the Chief Butler had overcome his natural reluctance to increase his own indebtedness to Pharaoh by interceding for a friend, supposing he had been willing to risk the friendship of the Captain of the Guard by interfering in so delicate a matter, and supposing Pharaoh had been willing to listen to him, what would have been the result ? Probably that Joseph would have been sold away to the quarries, for certainly he could not have been restored to Potiphar's house ; or, at the most, he might have received his liberty, and a free pass out of Egypt. That is to say, he would have obtained liberty to return to sheep-shearing and

cattle-dealing and checkmating his brother's plots. In any probable case his career would have tended rather towards obscurity than towards the fulfilment of his dreams.

There seems equal reason to congratulate Joseph on his friend's forgetfulness, when we consider its probable effects, not on his career, but on his character. When he was left in prison after so sudden and exciting an incursion of the outer world as the king's messengers would make, his mind must have run chiefly in two lines of thought. Naturally he would feel some envy of the man who was being restored; and when day after day passed and more than the former monotony of prison routine palled on his spirit; when he found how completely he was forgotten, and how friendless and lone a creature he was in that strange land where things had gone so mysteriously against him; when he saw before him no other fate than that which he had seen befall so many a slave thrown into a dungeon at his master's pleasure and never more heard of, he must have been sorely tempted to hate the whole world, and especially those brethren who had been the beginning of all his misfortunes. Had there been any selfishness in solution in Joseph's character, this is the point at which it would have quickly crystallized into permanent forms. For nothing more certainly elicits and confirms selfishness than bad treatment. But from his conduct on his release, we see clearly enough that through all this trying time his heroism was not only that of the strong man who vows that though the whole world is against him the day will come when the world shall have need of him, but of the saint of God in whom suffering and injustice leave no bitterness against his fellows, nor even provoke one slightest morbid utterance

But another process must have been going on in

Joseph's mind at the same time. He must have felt that it was a very serious thing that he had been called upon to do in interpreting God's will to his fellow-prisoners. No doubt he fell into it quite naturally and aptly, because it was liker his proper vocation, and more of his character could come out in it than in anything he had yet done. Still, to be mixed up thus with matters of life and death concerning other people, and to have men of practical ability and experience and high position listening to him as to an oracle, and to find that in very truth a great power was committed to him, was calculated to have *some* considerable result one way or other on Joseph. And these two years of unrelieved and sobering obscurity cannot but be considered most opportune. For one of two things is apt to follow the world's first recognition of a man's gifts. He is either induced to pander to the world's wonder and become artificial and strained in all he does, so losing the spontaneity and naturalness and sincerity which characterise the best work; or he is awed and steadied. And whether the one or the other result follow, will depend very much on the other things that are happening to him. In Joseph's case it was probably well that after having made proof of his powers he was left in such circumstances as would not only give him time for reflection, but also give a humble and believing turn to his reflections. He was not at once exalted to the priestly caste, nor enrolled among the wise men, nor put in any position in which he would have been under constant temptation to display and trifle with his power; and so he was led to the conviction that deeper even than the joy of receiving the recognition and gratitude of men was the abiding satisfaction of having done the thing God had given him to do.

These two years, then, during which Joseph's active mind must necessarily have been forced to provide food for itself, and have been thrown back upon his past experience, seem to have been of eminent service in maturing his character. The self-possessed dignity and ease of command which appear in him from the moment when he is ushered into Pharaoh's presence have their roots in these two years of silence. As the bones of a strong man are slowly, imperceptibly knit, and gradually take the shape and texture they retain throughout; so during these years there was silently and secretly consolidating a character of almost unparalleled calmness and power. One has no words to express how tantalizing it must have been to Joseph to see this Egyptian have his dreams so gladly and speedily fulfilled, while he himself, who had so long waited on the true God, was left waiting still, and now so utterly unbefriended that there seemed no possible way of ever again connecting himself with the world outside the prison walls. Being pressed thus for an answer to the question, What does God mean to make of my life? he was brought to see and to hold as the most important truth for him, that the first concern is, that God's purposes be accomplished; the second, that his own dreams be fulfilled. He was enabled, as we shall see in the sequel, to put God truly in the first place, and to see that by forwarding the interests of other men, even though they were but light-minded chief butlers at a foreign court, he might be as serviceably furthering the purposes of God, as if he were forwarding his own interests. He was compelled to seek for some principle that would sustain and guide him in the midst of much disappointment and perplexity, and he found it in the conviction that the

essential thing to be accomplished in this world, and to which every man must lay his shoulder, is God's purpose. Let that go on, and all else that should go on will go on. And he further saw that he best fulfils God's purpose who, without anxiety and impatience, does the duty of the day, and gives himself without stint to the "charities that soothe and heal and bless."

His perception of the breadth of God's purpose, and his profound and sympathetic and active submission to it, were qualities too rare not to be called into influential exercise. After two years he is suddenly summoned to become God's interpreter to Pharaoh. The Egyptian king was in the unhappy though not uncommon position of having a revelation from God which he could not read, intimations and presentiments he could not interpret. To one man is given the revelation, to another the interpretation. The official dignity of the king is respected, and to him is given the revelation which concerns the welfare of the whole people. But to read God's meaning in a revelation requires a spiritual intelligence trained to sympathy with His purposes, and such a spirit was found in Joseph alone.

The dreams of Pharaoh were thoroughly Egyptian. The marvel is, that a symbolism so familiar to the Egyptian eye should not have been easily legible to even the most slenderly gifted of Pharaoh's wise men. "In my dream," says the king, "behold, I stood upon the bank of the river: and, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine," and so on. Every land or city is proud of its river, but none has such cause to be so as Egypt of its Nile. The country is accurately as well as poetically called "the gift of Nile." Out of the river do really come good or bad years, fat or lean kine. Wholly dependent on its annual rise and

overflow for the irrigating and enriching of the soil, the people worship it and love it, and at the season of its overflow give way to the most rapturous expressions of joy. The cow also was reverenced as the symbol of the earth's productive power. If then, as Joseph avers, God wished to show to Pharaoh that seven years of plenty were approaching, this announcement could hardly have been made plainer in the language of dreams than by showing to Pharaoh seven well-favoured kine coming up out of the bountiful river to feed on the meadow made richly green by its waters. If the king had been sacrificing to the river, such a sight, familiar as it was to the dwellers by the Nile, might well have been accepted by him as a promise of plenty in the land. But what agitated Pharaoh, and gave him the shuddering presentiment of evil which accompanies some dreams, was the sequel. "Behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill-favoured and lean-fleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness: and the lean and the ill-favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine: and when they had eaten them up it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill-favoured, as at the beginning,"—a picture which to the inspired dream-reader represented seven years of famine so grievous, that the preceding plenty should be swallowed up and not be known. A similar image occurred to a writer who, in describing a more recent famine in the same land, says: "The year presented itself as a monster whose wrath must annihilate all the resources of life and all the means of subsistence."

It tells in favour of the court magicians and wise men that not one of them offered an interpretation of dreams to which it would certainly not have been

difficult to attach some tolerably feasible interpretation. Probably these men were as yet sincere devotees of astrology and occult science, and not the mere jugglers and charlatans their successors seem to have become. When men cannot make out the purpose of God regarding the future of the race, it is not wonderful that they should endeavour to catch the faintest, most broken echo of His voice to the world, wherever they can find it. Now there is a wide region, a borderland between the two worlds of spirit and of matter, in which are found a great many mysterious phenomena which cannot be explained by any known laws of nature, and through which men fancy they get nearer to the spiritual world. There are many singular and startling appearances, coincidences, forebodings, premonitions which men have always been attracted towards, and which they have considered as open ways of communication between God and man. There are dreams, visions, strange apprehensions, freaks of memory, and other mental phenomena, which, when all classed together, assorted, and skilfully applied to the reading of the future, once formed quite a science by itself. When men have no word from God to depend upon, no knowledge at all of where either the race or individuals are going to, they will eagerly grasp at anything that even seems to shed a ray of light on their future. We for the most part make light of that whole category of phenomena, because we have a more sure word of prophecy by which, as with a light in a dark place, we can tell where our next step should be, and what the end shall be. But invariably in heathen countries, where no guiding Spirit of God was believed in, and where the absence of His revealed will left numberless points of duty

doubtful and all the future dark, there existed in lieu of this a class of persons who, under one name or other, undertook to satisfy the craving of men to see into the future, to forewarn them of danger, and advise them regarding matters of conduct and affairs of state.

At various points of the history of God's revelation these professors of occult science appear. In each case a profound impression is made by the superior wisdom or power displayed by the "wise men" of God. But in reading the accounts we have of these collisions between the wisdom of God and that of the magicians, a slight feeling of uneasiness sometimes enters the mind. You may feel that these wonders of Joseph, Moses, and Daniel have a romantic air about them, and you feel, perhaps, a slight scruple in granting that God would lend Himself to such displays—displays so completely out of date in our day. But we are to consider not only that there is nothing of the kind more certain than that dreams do sometimes even now impart most significant warning to men; but, also, that the time in which Joseph lived was the childhood of the world, when God had neither spoken much to men, nor could speak much, because as yet they had not learned His language, but were only being slowly taught it by signs suited to their capacity. If these men were to receive any knowledge beyond what their own unaided efforts could attain, they must be taught in a language they understood. They could not be dealt with as if they had already attained a knowledge and a capacity which could only be theirs many centuries after; they must be dealt with by signs and wonders which had perhaps little moral teaching in them, but yet gave evidence of God's nearness and

power such as they could and did understand. God thus stretched out His hand to men in the darkness, and let them feel His strength before they could look on His face and understand His nature.

It is the existence at the court of Pharaoh of this highly respected class of dream-interpreters and wise men, which lends significance to the conduct of Joseph when summoned into the royal presence. Such wisdom as he displayed in reading Pharaoh's visions was looked upon as attainable by means within the reach of any man who had sufficient faculty for the science. And the first idea in the minds of the courtiers would probably have been, had Joseph not solemnly protested against it, that he was an adept where they were apprentices and bunglers, and that his success was due purely to professional skill. This was of course perfectly well known to Joseph, who for a number of years had been familiar with the ideas prevalent at the court of Pharaoh; and he might have argued that there could be no great harm in at least effecting his deliverance from an unjust imprisonment by allowing Pharaoh to suppose that it was to him he was indebted for the interpretation of his dreams. But his first word to Pharaoh is a self-renouncing exclamation: "Not in me: *God* shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Two years had elapsed since anything had occurred which looked the least like the fulfilment of his own dreams, or gave him any hope of release from prison; and now, when measuring himself with these courtiers and feeling able to take his place with the best of them, getting again a breath of free air and feeling once more the charm of life, and having an opening set before his young ambition, being so suddenly transferred from a place where his very existence seemed to be forgotten

to a place where Pharaoh himself and all his court eyed him with the intensest interest and anxiety, it is significant that he should appear regardless of his own fate, but jealously careful of the glory of God. Considering how jealous men commonly are of their own reputation, and how impatiently eager to receive all the credit that is due to them for their own share in any good that is doing, and considering of what essential importance it seemed that Joseph should seize this opportunity of providing for his own safety and advancement, and should use this as the tide in his affairs that led to fortune, his words and bearing before Pharaoh undoubtedly disclose a deeply inwrought fidelity to God, and a magnanimous patience regarding his own personal interests.

For it is extremely unlikely that in proposing to Pharaoh to set a man over this important business of collecting corn to last through the years of famine, it presented itself to Joseph as a conceivable result that he should be the person appointed—he a Hebrew, a slave, a prisoner, cleaned but for the nonce, could not suppose that Pharaoh would pass over all those tried officers and ministers of state around him and fix upon a youth who was wholly untried, and who might, by his different race and religion, prove obnoxious to the people. Joseph may have expected to make interest enough with Pharaoh to secure his freedom, and possibly some subordinate berth where he could hopefully begin the world again; but his only allusion to himself is of a depreciatory kind, while his reference to God is marked with a profound conviction that this is God's doing, and that to Him is due whatever is due. Well may the Hebrew race be proud of those men like Joseph and Daniel, who stood in the presence of foreign

monarchs in a spirit of perfect fidelity to God, commanding the respect of all, and clothed with the dignity and simplicity which that fidelity imparted. It matters not to Joseph that there may perhaps be none in that land who can appreciate his fidelity to God or understand his motive. It matters not what he may lose by it, or what he could gain by falling in with the notions of those around him. He himself knows the real state of the case, and will not act untruly to his God, even though for years he seems to have been forgotten by Him. With Daniel he says in spirit, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another. As for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but that the interpretation may be known to the king, and that thou mayest know the thoughts of thine heart. He that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass.' There is something particularly noble and worthy of admiration in a man thus standing alone and maintaining the fullest allegiance to God, without ostentation and with a quiet dignity and naturalness that show he has a great fund of strength behind.

That we do not misjudge Joseph's character or ascribe to him qualities which were invisible to his contemporaries, is apparent from the circumstance that Pharaoh and his advisers, with little or no hesitation, agreed that to no man could they more safely entrust their country in this emergency. The mere personal charm of Joseph might have won over those experienced advisers of the crown to make compensation for his imprisonment by an unusually handsome reward, but no mere attractiveness of person and manner, nor even the unquestionable guilelessness of his bearing, could have induced them to put such an affair as this into

his hands. Plainly they were impressed with Joseph; almost supernaturally impressed, and felt God through him. He stood before them as one mysteriously appearing in their emergency, sent out of unthought-of quarters to warn and save them. Happily there was as yet no jealousy of the God of the Hebrews, nor any exclusiveness on the part of the chosen people: Pharaoh and Joseph alike felt that there was one God over all and through all. And it was Joseph's self-abnegating sympathy with the purposes of this Supreme God that made him a transparent medium, so that in his presence the Egyptians felt themselves in the presence of God. It is so always. Influence in the long run belongs to those who rid their minds of all private aims, and get close to the great centre in which all the race meets and is cared for. Men feel themselves safe with the unselfish, with persons in whom they meet principle justice, truth, love, God. We are unattractive, useless, uninfluential, just because we are still childishly craving a private and selfish good. We know that a life which does not pour itself freely into the common stream of public good is lost in dry and sterile sands. We know that a life spent upon self is contemptible, barren, empty, yet how slowly do we come to the attitude of Joseph, who watched for the fulfilment of God's purposes, and found his happiness in forwarding what God designed for the people.

XXVIII.

JOSEPH'S ADMINISTRATION.

GEN. xli. 37-57, and xlvii. 13-26.

"He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom."—PSALM. cv. 21, 22.

"MANY a monument consecrated to the memory of some nobleman gone to his long home, who during life had held high rank at the court of Pharaoh, is decorated with the simple but laudatory inscription, 'His ancestors were unknown people'"—so we are told by our most accurate informant regarding Egyptian affairs. Indeed, the tales we read of adventurers in the East, and the histories which recount how some dynasties have been founded, are sufficient evidence that, in other countries besides Egypt, sudden elevation from the lowest to the highest rank is not so unusual as amongst ourselves. Historians have recently made out that in one period of the history of Egypt there are traces of a kind of Semitic mania, a strong leaning towards Syrian and Arabian customs, phrases, and persons. Such manias have occurred in most countries. There was a period in the history of Rome when everything that had a Greek flavour was admired; an Anglomania once affected a portion of the French population, and reciprocally, French manners and ideas have at

times found a welcome among ourselves. It is also clear that for a time Lower Egypt was under the dominion of foreign rulers who were in race more nearly allied to Joseph than to the native population. But there is no need that so complicated a question as the exact date of this foreign domination be debated here, for there was that in Joseph's bearing which would have commended him to any sagacious monarch. Not only did the court accept him as a messenger from God, but they could not fail to recognise substantial and serviceable human qualities alongside of what was mysterious in him. The ready apprehension with which he appreciated the magnitude of the danger, the clear-sighted promptitude with which he met it, the resource and quiet capacity with which he handled a matter involving the entire condition of Egypt, showed them that they were in the presence of a true statesman. No doubt the confidence with which he described the best method of dealing with the emergency was the confidence of one who was convinced he was speaking for God. This was the great distinction they perceived between Joseph and ordinary dream-interpreters. It was not guesswork with him. The same distinction is always apparent between revelation and speculation. Revelation speaks with authority; speculation gropes its way, and when wisest is most diffident. At the same time Pharaoh was perfectly right in his inference: "Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art." He believed that God had chosen him to deal with this matter because he was wise in heart, and he believed his wisdom would remain because God had chosen him.

At length, then, Joseph saw the fulfilment of his dreams within his reach. The coat of many colours

with which his father had paid a tribute to the princely person and ways of the boy, was now replaced by the robe of state and the heavy gold necklace which marked him out as second to Pharaoh. Whatever nerve and self-command and humble dependence on God his varied experience had wrought in him were all needed when Pharaoh took his hand and placed his own ring on it, thus transferring all his authority to him, and when turning from the king he received the acclamations of the court and the people, bowed to by his old masters, and acknowledged the superior of all the dignitaries and potentates of Egypt. Only once besides, so far as the Egyptian inscriptions have yet been deciphered, does it appear that any subject was raised to be Regent or Viceroy with similar powers. Joseph is, as far as possible, naturalised as an Egyptian. He receives a name easier of pronunciation than his own, at least to Egyptian tongues—Zaphnath-Paaneah, which, however, was perhaps only an official title meaning "Governor of the district of the place of life," the name by which one of the Egyptian counties or states was known. The king crowned his liberality and completed the process of naturalisation by providing him with a wife, Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On. This city was not far from Avaris or Haouar, where Joseph's Pharaoh, Ra-apepi II., at this time resided. The worship of the sun-god, Ra, had its centre at On (or Heliopolis, as it was called by the Greeks), and the priests of On took precedence of all Egyptian priests. Joseph was thus connected with one of the most influential families in the land, and if he had any scruples about marrying into an idolatrous family, they were too insignificant to influence his conduct, or leave any trace in the narrative.

His attitude towards God and his own family was disclosed in the names which he gave to his children. In giving names which had a meaning at all, and not merely a taking sound, he showed that he understood, as well he might, that every human life has a significance and expresses some principle or fact. And in giving names which recorded his acknowledgment of God's goodness, he showed that prosperity had as little influence as adversity to move him from his allegiance to the God of his fathers. His first son he called Manasseh, *Making to forget*, "for God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house" —not as if he were now so abundantly satisfied in Egypt that the thought of his father's house was blotted from his mind, but only that in this child the keen longings he had felt for kindred and home were somewhat alleviated. He again found an object for his strong family affection. The void in his heart he had so long felt was filled by the little babe. A new home was begun around him. But this new affection would not weaken, though it would alter the character of, his love for his father and brethren. The birth of this child would really be a new tie to the land from which he had been stolen. For, however ready men are to spend their own life in foreign service, you see them wishing that their children should spend their days among the scenes with which their own childhood was familiar.

In the naming of his second son Ephraim he recognises that God had made him fruitful in the most unlikely way. He does not leave it to us to interpret his life, but records what he himself saw in it. It has been said: "To get at the truth of any history is good; but a man's own history - when he reads that

truly, . . . and knows what he is about and has been about, it is a Bible to him." And now that Joseph, from the height he had reached, could look back on the way by which he had been led to it, he cordially approved of all that God had done. There was no resentment, no murmuring. He would often find himself looking back and thinking, Had I found my brothers where I thought they were, had the pit not been on the caravan-road, had the merchants not come up so opportunely, had I not been sold at all or to some other master, had I not been imprisoned, or had I been put in another ward—had any one of the many slender links in the chain of my career been absent, how different might my present state have been. How plainly I now see that all those sad mishaps that crushed my hopes and tortured my spirit were steps in the only conceivable path to my present position.

Many a man has added his signature to this acknowledgment of Joseph's, and confessed a providence guiding his life and working out good for him through injuries and sorrows, as well as through honours, marriages, births. As in the heat of summer it is difficult to recall the sensation of winter's bitter cold, so the fruitless and barren periods of a man's life are sometimes quite obliterated from his memory. God has it in His power to raise a man higher above the level of ordinary happiness than ever he has sunk below it; and as winter and spring-time, when the seed is sown, are stormy and bleak and gusty, so in human life seed-time is not bright as summer nor cheerful as autumn; and yet it is then, when all the earth lies bare and will yield us nothing, that the precious seed is sown: and when we confidently commit our labour or patience of to-day to God, the

land of our affliction, now bare and desolate, will certainly wave for us, as it has waved for others, with rich produce whitened to the harvest.

There is no doubt then that Joseph had learned to recognise the providence of God as a most important factor in his life. And the man who does so, gains for his character all the strength and resolution that come with a capacity for waiting. He saw, most legibly written on his own life, that God is never in a hurry. And for the resolute adherence to his seven-years' policy such a belief was most necessary. Nothing, indeed, is said of opposition or incredulity on the part of the Egyptians. But was there ever a policy of such magnitude carried out in any country without opposition or without evilly-disposed persons using it as a weapon against its promoter? No doubt during these years he had need of all the personal determination as well as of all the official authority he possessed. And if, on the whole, remarkable success attended his efforts, we must ascribe this partly to the unchallengeable justice of his arrangements, and partly to the impression of commanding genius Joseph seems everywhere to have made. As with his father and brethren he was felt to be superior, as in Potiphar's house he was quickly recognised, as in the prison no prison-garb or slave-brand could disguise him, as in the court his superiority was instinctively felt, so in his administration the people seem to have believed in him.

And if, on the whole and in general, Joseph was reckoned a wise and equitable ruler, and even adored as a kind of saviour of the world, it would be idle in us to canvass the wisdom of his administration. When we have not sufficient historical material to

apprehend the full significance of any policy, it is safe to accept the judgment of men who not only knew the facts, but were themselves so deeply involved in them that they would certainly have felt and expressed discontent had there been ground for doing so. The policy of Joseph was simply to economize during the seven years of abundance to such an extent that provision might be made against the seven years of famine. He calculated that one-fifth of the produce of years so extraordinarily plenteous would serve for the seven scarce years. This fifth he seems to have bought in the king's name from the people, buying it, no doubt, at the cheap rates of abundant years. When the years of famine came, the people were referred to Joseph; and, till their money was gone, he sold corn to them, probably not at famine prices. Next he acquired their cattle, and finally, in exchange for food, they yielded to him both their lands and their persons. So that the result of the whole was, that the people who would otherwise have perished were preserved, and in return for this preservation they paid a tax or rent on their farm-lands to the amount of one-fifth of their produce. The people ceased to be proprietors of their own farms, but they were not slaves with no interest in the soil, but tenants sitting at easy rents—a fair enough exchange for being preserved in life. This kind of taxation is eminently fair in principle, securing, as it does, that the wealth of the king and government shall vary with the prosperity of the whole land. The chief difficulty that has always been experienced in working it, has arisen from the necessity of leaving a good deal of discretionary power in the hands of the collectors, who have generally been found not slow to abuse this power.

The only semblance of despotism in Joseph's policy is found in the curious circumstance that he interfered with the people's choice of residence, and shifted them from one end of the land to another. This may have been necessary not only as a kind of seal on the deed by which the lands were conveyed to the king, and as a significant sign to them that they were mere tenants, but also Joseph probably saw that for the interests of the country, if not of agricultural prosperity, this shifting had become necessary for the breaking up of illegal associations, nests of sedition, and sectional prejudices and enmities which were endangering the community.* Modern experience supplies us with instances in which, by such a policy, a country might be regenerated and a seven years' famine hailed as a blessing if, without famishing the people, it put them unconditionally into the hands of an able, bold, and beneficent ruler. And this was a policy which could be much better devised and executed by a foreigner than by a native.

Egypt's indebtedness to Joseph was, in fact, two-fold. In the first place he succeeded in doing what many strong governments have failed to do: he enabled a large population to survive a long and severe famine. Even with all modern facilities for transport and for making the abundance of remote countries available for times of scarcity, it has not always been found possible to save our own fellow-subjects from starvation. In a prolonged famine which occurred in Egypt during the

* "It happened very often that the inhabitants of one district threatened an attack on the occupants of another on account of some dispute about divine or human questions. The hostile feelings of the opponents not unfrequently broke out into a hard struggle, and it required the whole armed power of the king to extinguish at its first outburst the flaming torch of war, kindled by domineering chiefs of nomes or ambitious priests."—Brugsch, *History of Egypt*, i. 16.

middle ages, the inhabitants, reduced to the unnatural habits which are the most painful feature of such times, not only ate their own dead, but kidnapped the living on the streets of Cairo and consumed them in secret. One of the most touching memorials of the famine with which Joseph had to deal is found in a sepulchral inscription in Arabia. A flood of rain laid bare a tomb in which lay a woman having on her person a profusion of jewels which represented a very large value. At her head stood a coffer filled with treasure, and a tablet with this inscription: "In Thy name, O God, the God of Himyar, I, Tayar, the daughter of Dzu Shefar, sent my steward to Joseph, and he delaying to return to me, I sent my handmaid with a measure of silver to bring me back a measure of flour; and not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of gold; and not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of pearls; and not being able to procure it, I commanded them to be ground; and finding no profit in them, I am shut up here." If this inscription is genuine—and there seems no reason to call it in question—it shows that there is no exaggeration in the statement of our narrator that the famine was very grievous in other lands as well as in Egypt. And, whether genuine or not, one cannot but admire the grim humour of the starving woman getting herself buried in the jewels which had suddenly dropped to less than the value of a loaf of bread.

But besides being indebted to Joseph for their preservation, the Egyptians owed to him an extension of their influence; for, as all the lands round about became dependent on Egypt for provision, they must have contracted a respect for the Egyptian administration. They must also have added greatly to Egypt's wealth

and during those years of constant traffic many commercial connections must have been formed which in future years would be of untold value to Egypt. But above all, the permanent alterations made by Joseph on their tenure of land, and on their places of abode, may have convinced the most sagacious of the Egyptians that it was well for them that their money had failed, and that they had been compelled to yield themselves unconditionally into the hands of this remarkable ruler. It is the mark of a competent statesman that he makes temporary distress the occasion for permanent benefit; and from the confidence Joseph won with the people, there seems every reason to believe that the permanent alterations he introduced were considered as beneficial as certainly they were bold.

And for our own spiritual uses it is this point which seems chiefly important. In Joseph is illustrated the principle that, in order to the attainment of certain blessings, unconditional submission to God's delegate is required. If we miss this, we miss a large part of what his history exhibits, and it becomes a mere pretty story. The prominent idea in his dreams was that he was to be worshipped by his brethren. In his exaltation by Pharaoh, the absolute authority given to him is again conspicuous: "Without thee shall no man lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." And still the same autocracy appears in the fact that not one Egyptian who was helpful to him in this matter is mentioned; and no one has received such exclusive possession of a considerable part of Scripture, so personal and outstanding a place. All this leaves upon the mind the impression that Joseph becomes a benefactor, and in his degree a saviour, to men by becoming their absolute master. When this was hinted in his

dreams at first his brothers fiercely resented it. But when they were put to the push by famine, both they and the Egyptians recognised that he was appointed by God to be their saviour, while at the same time they markedly and consciously submitted themselves to him. Men may always be expected to recognise that he who can save them alive in famine has a right to order the bounds of their habitation; and also that in the hands of one who, from disinterested motives, has saved them, they are likely to be quite as safe as in their own. And if we are all quite sure of this, that men of great political sagacity can regulate our affairs with tenfold the judgment and success that we ourselves could achieve, we cannot wonder that in matters still higher, and for which we are notoriously incompetent, there should be One into whose hands it is well to commit ourselves—One whose judgment is not warped by the prejudices which blind all mere natives of this world, but who, separate from sinners yet naturalised among us, can both detect and rectify everything in our condition which is less than perfect. If there are certainly many cases in which explanations are out of the question, and in which the governed, if they are wise, will yield themselves to a trusted authority, and leave it to time and results to justify his measures, any one, I think, who anxiously considers our spiritual condition must see that here too obedience is for us the greater part of wisdom, and that, after all speculation and efforts at sufficing investigation, we can still do no better than yield ourselves absolutely to Jesus Christ. He alone understands our whole position; He alone speaks with the authority that commands confidence, because it is felt to be the authority of the truth. We feel the present pressure of famine; we have discernment enough,

some of us, to know we are in danger, but we cannot penetrate deeply either into the cause or the possible consequences of our present state. But Christ—if we may continue the figure—legislates with a breadth of administrative capacity which includes not only our present distress but our future condition, and, with the boldness of one who is master of the whole case, requires that we put ourselves wholly into His hand. He takes the responsibility of all the changes we make in obedience to Him, and proposes so to relieve us that the relief shall be permanent, and that the very emergency which has thrown us upon His help shall be the occasion of our transference not merely out of the present evil, but into the best possible form of human life.

From this chapter, then, in the history of Joseph, we may reasonably take occasion to remind ourselves, first, that in all things pertaining to God unconditional submission to Christ is necessarily required of us. Apart from Christ we cannot tell what are the necessary elements of a permanently happy state; nor, indeed, even whether there is any such state awaiting us. There is a great deal of truth in what is urged by unbelievers to the effect that spiritual matters are in great measure beyond our cognizance, and that many of our religious phrases are but, as it were, thrown out in the direction of a truth but do not perfectly represent it. No doubt we are in a provisional state, in which we are not in direct contact with the absolute truth, nor in a final attitude of mind towards it; and certain representations of things given in the Word of God may seem to us not to cover the whole truth. But this only compels the conclusion that for us Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. To probe existence to the bottom is plainly not in our power. To say precisely what God is, and

how we are to carry ourselves towards Him, is possible only to him who has been with God and is God. To submit to the Spirit of Christ, and to live under those influences and views which formed His life, is the only method that promises deliverance from that moral condition which makes spiritual vision impossible.

We may remind ourselves, secondly, that this submission to Christ should be consistently adhered to in connection with those outward occurrences in our life which give us opportunity of enlarging our spiritual capacity. There can be little doubt that there would be presented to Joseph many a plan for the better administration of this whole matter, and many a petition from individuals craving exemption from the seemingly arbitrary and certainly painful and troublesome edict regulating change of residence. Many a man would think himself much wiser than the minister of Pharaoh in whom was the Spirit of God. When we act in a similar manner, and take upon us to specify with precision the changes we should like to see in our condition, and the methods by which these changes might best be accomplished, we commonly manifest our own incompetence. The changes which the strong hand of Providence enforces, the dislocation which our life suffers from some irresistible blow, the necessity laid upon us to begin life again and on apparently disadvantageous terms, are naturally resented; but these things being certainly the result of some unguardedness, improvidence, or weakness in our past state, are necessarily the means most appropriate for disclosing to us these elements of calamity and for securing our permanent welfare. We rebel against such perilous and sweeping revolutions as the basing of our life on a new foundation demands; we would disregard the

appointments of Providence if we could; but both our voluntary consent to the authority of Christ and the impossibility of resisting His providential arrangements, prevent us from refusing to fall in with them, however needless and tyrannical they seem, and however little we perceive that they are intended to accomplish our permanent well-being. And it is in after years, when the pain of severance from old friends and habits is healed, and when the discomfort of adapting ourselves to a new kind of life is replaced by peaceful and docile resignation to new conditions, that we reach the clear perception that the changes we resented have in point of fact rendered harmless the seeds of fresh disaster, and rescued us from the results of long bad government. He who has most keenly felt the hardship of being diverted from his original course in life, will in after life tell you that had he been allowed to hold his own land, and remain his own master in his old loved abode, he would have lapsed into a condition from which no worthy harvest could be expected. If a man only wishes that his own conceptions of prosperity be realised, then let him keep his land in his own hand and work his material irrespective of God's demands; for certainly if he yields himself to God, his own ideas of prosperity will not be realised. But if he suspects that God may have a more liberal conception of prosperity and may understand better than he what is eternally beneficial, let him commit himself and all his material of prosperity without doubting into God's hand, and let him greedily obey all God's precepts; for in neglecting one of these, he so far neglects and misses what God would have him enter into.

XXIX.

VISITS OF JOSEPH'S BRETHREN.

GEN. xlii.-xliv.

"Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."—GEN. l. 19, 20.

THE purpose of God to bring Israel into Egypt was accomplished by the unconscious agency of Joseph's natural affection for his kindred. Tenderness towards home is usually increased by residence in a foreign land; for absence, like a little death, sheds a halo round those separated from us. But Joseph could not as yet either re-visit his old home or invite his father's family into Egypt. Even, indeed, when his brothers first appeared before him, he seems to have had no immediate intention of inviting them as a family to settle in the country of his adoption, or even to visit it. If he had cherished any such purpose or desire he might have sent down wagons at once, as he at last did, to bring his father's household out of Canaan. Why, then, did he proceed so cautiously? Whence this mystery, and disguise, and circuitous compassing of his end? What intervened between the first and last visit of his brethren to make it seem advisable to disclose himself and invite them? Manifestly there had intervened enough to give Joseph insight into the state of mind his brethren were in, enough to satisfy

him they were not the men they had been, and that it was safe to ask them and would be pleasant to have them with him in Egypt. Fully alive to the elements of disorder and violence that once existed among them, and having had no opportunity of ascertaining whether they were now altered, there was no course open but that which he adopted of endeavouring in some unobserved way to discover whether twenty years had wrought any change in them.

For effecting this object he fell on the expedient of imprisoning them, on pretence of their being spies. This served the double purpose of detaining them until he should have made up his mind as to the best means of dealing with them, and of securing their retention under his eye until some display of character might sufficiently certify him of their state of mind. Possibly he adopted this expedient also because it was likely deeply to move them, so that they might be expected to exhibit not such superficial feelings as might have been elicited had he set them down to a banquet and entered into conversation with them over their wine, but such as men are surprised to find in themselves, and know nothing of in their lighter hours. Joseph was, of course, well aware that in the analysis of character the most potent elements are only brought into clear view when the test of severe trouble is applied, and when men are thrown out of all conventional modes of thinking and speaking.

The display of character which Joseph awaited he speedily obtained. For so new an experience to these free dwellers in tents as imprisonment under grim Egyptian guards worked wonders in them. Men who have experienced such treatment aver that nothing more effectually tames and breaks the spirit: it is not the

being confined for a definite time with the certainty of release in the end, but the being shut up at the caprice of another on a false and absurd accusation; the being cooped up at the will of a stranger in a foreign country, uncertain and hopeless of release. To Joseph's brethren so sudden and great a calamity seemed explicable only on the theory that it was retribution for the great crime of their life. The uneasy feeling which each of them had hidden in his own conscience, and which the lapse of twenty years had not materially alleviated, finds expression: "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." The similarity of their position to that in which they had placed their brother stimulates and assists their conscience. Joseph, in the anguish of his soul, had protested his innocence, but they had not listened; and now their own protestations are treated as idle wind by this Egyptian. Their own feelings, representing to them what they had caused Joseph to suffer, stir a keener sense of their guilt than they seem ever before to have reached. Under this new light they see their sin more clearly, and are humbled by the distress into which it has brought them.

When Joseph sees this, his heart warms to them. He may not yet be quite sure of them. A prison-repentance is perhaps scarcely to be trusted. He sees they would for the moment deal differently with him had they the opportunity, and would welcome no one more heartily than himself, whose coming among them had once so exasperated them. Himself keen in his affections, he is deeply moved, and his eyes fill with tears as he witnesses their emotion and grief on his account.

Fain would he relieve them from their remorse and apprehension—why, then, does he forbear? Why does he not at this juncture disclose himself? It has been satisfactorily proved that his brethren counted their sale of him the great crime of their life. Their imprisonment has elicited evidence that that crime had taken in their conscience the capital place, the place which a man finds some one sin or series of sins will take, to follow him with its appropriate curse, and hang over his future like a cloud—a sin of which he thinks when any strange thing happens to him, and to which he traces all disaster—a sin so iniquitous that it seems capable of producing any results however grievous, and to which he has so given himself that his life seems to be concentrated there, and he cannot but connect with it all the greater ills that happen to him. Was not this, then, security enough that they would never again perpetrate a crime of like atrocity? Every man who has almost at all observed the history of sin in himself, will say that most certainly it was quite insufficient security against their ever again doing the like. Evidence that a man is conscious of his sin, and, while suffering from its consequences, feels deeply its guilt, is not evidence that his character is altered.

And because we believe men so much more readily than God, and think that they do not require, for form's sake, such needless pledges of a changed character as God seems to demand, it is worth observing that Joseph, moved as he was even to tears, felt that common prudence forbade him to commit himself to his brethren without further evidence of their disposition. They had distinctly acknowledged their guilt, and in his hearing had admitted that the great calamity that had befallen them was no more than they

deserved; yet Joseph, judging merely as an intelligent man who had worldly interests depending on his judgment, could not discern enough here to justify him in supposing that his brethren were changed men. And it might sometimes serve to expose the insufficiency of our repentance were clear-seeing men the judges of it, and did they express their opinion of its trustworthiness. We may think that God is needlessly exacting when He requires evidence not only of a changed mind about past sin, but also of such a mind being now in us as will preserve us from future sin; but the truth is, that no man whose common worldly interests were at stake would commit himself to us on any less evidence. God, then, meaning to bring the house of Israel into Egypt in order to make progress in the Divine education He was giving to them, could not introduce them into that land in a state of mind which would negative all the discipline they were there to receive.

These men then had to give evidence that they not only saw, and in some sense repented of, their sin, but also that they had got rid of the evil passion which had led to it. This is what God means by repentance. Our sins are in general not so microscopic that it requires very keen spiritual discernment to perceive them. But to be quite aware of our sin, and to acknowledge it, is not to repent of it. Everything falls short of thorough repentance which does not prevent us from committing the sin anew. We do not so much desire to be accurately informed about our past sins, and to get right views of our past selves; we wish to be no longer sinners, we wish to pass through some process by which we may be separated from that in us which has led us into sin. Such a process there is, for these men passed through it.

The test which revealed the thoroughness of his brothers' repentance was unintentionally applied by Joseph. When he hid his cup in Benjamin's sack, all that he intended was to furnish a pretext for detaining Benjamin, and so gratifying his own affection. But, to his astonishment, his trick effected far more than he intended; for the brothers, recognising now their brotherhood, circled round Benjamin, and, to a man, resolved to go back with him to Egypt. We cannot argue from this that Joseph had misapprehended the state of mind in which his brothers were, and in his judgment of them had been either too timorous or too severe; nor need we suppose that he was hampered by his relations to Pharaoh, and therefore unwilling to connect himself too closely with men of whom he might be safer to be rid; because it was this very peril of Benjamin's that matured their brotherly affection. They themselves could not have anticipated that they would make such a sacrifice for Benjamin. But throughout their dealings with this mysterious Egyptian, they felt themselves under a spell, and were being gradually, though perhaps unconsciously, softened, and in order to complete the change passing upon them, they but required some such incident as this of Benjamin's arrest. This incident seemed by some strange fatality to threaten them with a renewed perpetration of the very crime they had committed against Rachel's other son. It threatened to force them to become again the instrument of bereaving their father of his darling child, and bringing about that very calamity which they had pledged themselves should never happen. It was an incident, therefore, which, more than any other was likely to call out their family love.

The scene lives in every one's memory. They were going gladly back to their own country with corn enough for their children, proud of their entertainment by the lord of Egypt; anticipating their father's exultation when he heard how generously they had been treated and when he saw Benjamin safely restored, feeling that in bringing him back they almost compensated for having bereaved him of Joseph. Simeon is revelling in the free air that blew from Canaan and brought with it the scents of his native land, and breaks into the old songs that the strait confinement of his prison had so long silenced—all of them together rejoicing in a scarcely hoped-for success; when suddenly, ere the first elation is spent, they are startled to see the hasty approach of the Egyptian messenger, and to hear the stern summons that brought them to a halt, and boded all ill. The few words of the just Egyptian, and his calm, explicit judgment, "Ye have done evil in so doing," pierce them like a keen blade—that they should be suspected of robbing one who had dealt so generously with them; that all Israel should be put to shame in the sight of the stranger! But they begin to feel relief as one brother after another steps forward with the boldness of innocence; and as sack after sack is emptied, shaken, and flung aside, they already eye the steward with the bright air of triumph; when, as the very last sack is emptied, and as all breathlessly stand round, amid the quick rustle of the corn, the sharp rattle of metal strikes on their ear, and the gleam of silver dazzles their eyes as the cup rolls out in the sunshine. This, then, is the brother of whom their father was so careful that he dared not suffer him out of his sight! This is the precious youth

whose life was of more value than the lives of all the brethren, and to keep whom a few months longer in his father's sight Simeon had been left to rot in a dungeon! This is how he repays the anxiety of the family and their love, and this is how he repays the extraordinary favour of Joseph! By one rash childish act had this fondled youth, to all appearance, brought upon the house of Israel irretrievable disgrace, if not complete extinction. Had these men been of their old temper, their knives had very speedily proved that their contempt for the deed was as great as the Egyptian's; by violence towards Benjamin they might have cleared themselves of all suspicion of complicity; or, at the best, they might have considered themselves to be acting in a fair and even lenient manner if they had surrendered the culprit to the steward, and once again carried back to their father a tale of blood. But they were under the spell of their old sin. In all disaster, however innocent they now were, they saw the retribution of their old iniquity; they seem scarcely to consider whether Benjamin was innocent or guilty, but as humbled, God-smitten men, "they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city."

Thus Joseph in seeking to gain *one* brother found eleven—for now there could be no doubt that they were very different men from those brethren who had so heartlessly sold into slavery their father's favourite – men now with really brotherly feelings, by penitence and regard for their father so wrought together into one family, that this calamity, intended to fall only on one of their number, did in falling on him fall on them all. So far from wishing now to rid themselves of Rachel's son and their father's favourite, who had

been put by their father in so prominent a place in his affection, they will not even give him up to suffer what seemed the just punishment of his theft, do not even reproach him with having brought them all into disgrace and difficulty, but, as humbled men who knew they had greater sins of their own to answer for, went quietly back to Egypt, determined to see their younger brother through his misfortune or to share his bondage with him. Had these men not been thoroughly changed, thoroughly convinced that at all costs upright dealing and brotherly love should continue; had they not possessed that first and last of Christian virtues, love to their brother, then nothing could so certainly have revealed their want of it as this apparent theft of Benjamin's. It seemed in itself a very likely thing that a lad accustomed to plain modes of life, and whose character it was to "ravin as a wolf," should, when suddenly introduced to the gorgeous Egyptian banqueting-house with all its sumptuous furnishings, have coveted some choice specimen of Egyptian art, to carry home to his father as proof that he could not only bring himself back in safety, but scorned to come back from any expedition empty-handed. It was not unlikely either that, with his mother's own superstition, he might have conceived the bold design of robbing this Egyptian, so mysterious and so powerful, according to his brothers' account, and of breaking that spell which he had thrown over them; he may thus have conceived the idea of achieving for himself a reputation in the family, and of once for all redeeming himself from the somewhat undignified, and to one of his spirit somewhat uncongenial, position of the youngest of a family. If, as is possible, he had let any such idea ooze out in talking with his brethren as they went

down to Egypt, and only abandoned it on their indignant and urgent remonstrance, then when the cup, Joseph's chief treasure according to his own account, was discovered in Benjamin's sack, the case must have looked sadly against him even in the eyes of his brethren. No protestations of innocence in a particular instance avail much when the character and general habits of the accused point to guilt. It is quite possible, therefore, that the brethren, though willing to believe Benjamin, were yet not so thoroughly convinced of his innocence as they would have desired. The fact that they themselves had found their money returned in their sacks, made for Benjamin; yet in most cases, especially where circumstances corroborate it, an accusation even against the innocent takes immediate hold and cannot be summarily and at once got rid of.

Thus was proof given that the house of Israel was now in truth one family. The men who, on very slight instigation, had without compunction sold Joseph to a life of slavery, cannot now find it in their heart to abandon a brother who, to all appearance, was worthy of no better life than that of a slave, and who had brought them all into disgrace and danger. Judah had no doubt pledged himself to bring the lad back without scathe to his father, but he had done so without contemplating the possibility of Benjamin becoming amenable to Egyptian law. And no one can read the speech of Judah—one of the most pathetic on record—in which he replies to Joseph's judgment that Benjamin alone should remain in Egypt, without perceiving that he speaks not as one who merely seeks to redeem a pledge, but as a good son and a good brother. He speaks, too, as the mouth-piece of the rest, and as he had taken the lead in Joseph's sale, so he does not

shrink from standing forward and accepting the heavy responsibility which may now light upon the man who represents these brethren. His former faults are redeemed by the courage, one may say heroism, he now shows. And as he spoke, so the rest felt. They could not bring themselves to inflict a new sorrow on their aged father; neither could they bear to leave their young brother in the hands of strangers. The passions which had alienated them from one another, and had threatened to break up the family, are subdued. There is now discernible a common feeling that binds them together, and a common object for which they willingly sacrifice themselves. They are, therefore, now prepared to pass into that higher school to which God called them in Egypt. It mattered little what strong and equitable laws they found in the land of their adoption, if they had no taste for upright living; it mattered little what thorough national organization they would be brought into contact with in Egypt, if in point of fact they owned no common brotherhood, and were willing rather to live as units and every man for himself than for any common interest. But now they were prepared, open to teaching, and docile.

To complete our apprehension of the state of mind into which the brethren were brought by Joseph's treatment of them, we must take into account the assurance he gave them, when he made himself known to them, that it was not they but God who had sent him into Egypt, and that God had done this for the purpose of preserving the whole house of Israel. At first sight this might seem to be an injudicious speech, calculated to make the brethren think lightly of their guilt, and to remove the just impressions they now entertained of the unbrotherliness of their conduct to Joseph. And it

might have been an injudicious speech to impenitent men; but no further view of sin can lighten its heinousness to a really penitent sinner. Prove to him that his sin has become the means of untold good, and you only humble him the more, and more deeply convince him that while he was recklessly gratifying himself and sacrificing others for his own pleasure, God has been mindful of others, and, pardoning him, has blessed them. God does not need our sins to work out His good intentions, but we give Him little other material; and the discovery that through our evil purposes and injurious deeds God has worked out His beneficent will, is certainly not calculated to make us think more lightly of our sin or more highly of ourselves.

Joseph in thus addressing his brethren did, in fact, but add to their feelings the tenderness that is in all religious conviction, and that springs out of the consciousness that in all our sin there has been with us a holy and loving Father, mindful of His children. This is the final stage of penitence. The knowledge that God has prevented our sin from doing the harm it might have done, does relieve the bitterness and despair with which we view our life, but at the same time it strengthens the most effectual bulwark between us and sin—love to a holy, over-ruling God. This, therefore, may always be safely said to penitents: Out of your worst sin God can bring good to yourself or to others, and good of an apparently necessary kind; but good of a permanent kind can result from your sin only when you have truly repented of it, and sincerely wish you had never done it. Once this repentance is really wrought in you, then, though your life can never be the same as it might have been had you not sinned, it may be, in some respects, a more richly developed life, a life

fuller of humility and love. You can never have what you sold for your sin; but the poverty your sin has brought may excite within you thoughts and energies more valuable than what you have lost, as these men lost a brother but found a Saviour. The wickedness that has often made you bow your head and mourn in secret, and which is in itself unutterable shame and loss, may, in God's hand, become food against the day of famine. You cannot ever have the enjoyments which are possible only to those whose conscience is laden with no evil remembrances, and whose nature, uncontracted and unwithered by familiarity with sin, can give itself to enjoyment with the abandonment and fearlessness reserved for the innocent. No more at all will you have that fineness of feeling which only ignorance of evil can preserve; no more that high and great conscientiousness which, once broken, is never repaired; no more that respect from other men which for ever and instinctively departs from those who have lost self-respect. But you may have a more intelligent sympathy with other men and a keener pity for them; the experience you have gathered too late to save yourself may put it in your power to be of essential service to others. You cannot win your way back to the happy, useful, evenly-developed life of the comparatively innocent, but the life of the true-hearted penitent is yet open to you. Every beat of your heart now may be as if it throbbed against a poisoned dagger, every duty may shame you, every day bring weariness and new humiliation, but let no pain or discouragement avail to defraud you of the good fruits of true reconciliation to God and submission to His lifelong discipline. See that you lose not both lives, the life of the comparatively innocent and the life of the truly penitent.

XXX.

THE RECONCILIATION.

GEN. xlv.

"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." —HEB. xi. 22.

IT is generally by some circumstance or event which perplexes, troubles, or gladdens us, that new thoughts regarding conduct are presented to us, and new impulses communicated to our life. And the circumstances through which Joseph's brethren passed during the famine not only subdued and softened them to a genuine family feeling, but elicited in Joseph himself a more tender affection for them than he seems at first to have cherished. For the first time since his entrance into Egypt did he feel, when Judah spoke so touchingly and effectively, that the family of Israel was one; and that he himself would be reprehensible did he make further breaches in it by carrying out his intention of detaining Benjamin. Moved by Judah's pathetic appeal, and yielding to the generous impulse of the moment, and being led by a right state of feeling to a right judgment regarding duty, he claimed his brethren as brethren, and proposed that the whole family be brought into Egypt.

The scene in which the sacred writer describes the

reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers is one of the most touching on record;—the long estrangement so happily terminated; the caution, the doubts, the hesitation on Joseph's part, swept away at last by the resistless tide of long pent-up emotion; the surprise and perplexity of the brethren as they dared now to lift their eyes and scrutinize the face of the governor, and discerned the lighter complexion of the Hebrew, the features of the family of Jacob, the expression of their own brother; the anxiety with which they wait to know how he means to repay their crime, and the relief with which they hear that he bears them no ill-will—everything, in short, conduces to render this recognition of the brethren interesting and affecting. That Joseph, who had controlled his feeling in many a trying situation, should now have "wept aloud," needs no explanation. Tears always express a mingled feeling; at least the tears of a man do. They may express grief, but it is grief with some remorse in it, or it is grief passing into resignation. They may express joy, but it is joy born of long sorrow, the joy of deliverance, joy that can now afford to let the heart weep out the fears it has been holding down. It is as with a kind of breaking of the heart, and apparent unmanning of the man, that the human soul takes possession of its greatest treasures; unexpected success and unmerited joy humble a man; and as laughter expresses the surprise of the intellect, so tears express the amazement of the soul when it is stormed suddenly by a great joy. Joseph had been hardening himself to lead a solitary life in Egypt, and it is with all this strong self-sufficiency breaking down within him that he eyes his brethren. It is his love for them making its way through all his ability to do without them, and sweeping away as a

flood the bulwarks he had built round his heart,—it is this that breaks him down before them, a man conquered by his own love, and unable to control it. It compels him to make himself known, and to possess himself of its objects, those unconscious brethren. It is a signal instance of the law by which love brings all the best and holiest beings into contact with their inferiors, and, in a sense, puts them in their power, and thus eternally provides that the superiority of those that are high in the scale of being shall ever be at the service of those who in themselves are not so richly endowed. The higher any being is, the more love is in him : that is to say, the higher he is, the more surely is he bound to all who are beneath him. If God is highest of all, it is because there is in Him sufficiency for all His creatures, and love to make it universally available.

It is one of our most familiar intellectual pleasures to see in the experience of others, or to read, a lucid and moving account of emotions identical with those which have once been our own. In reading an account of what others have passed through, our pleasure is derived mainly from two sources—either from our being brought, by sympathy with them and in imagination, into circumstances we ourselves have never been placed in, and thus artificially enlarging our sphere of life, and adding to our experience feelings which could not have been derived from anything we ourselves have met with ; or, from our living over again, by means of their experience, a part of our life which had great interest and meaning to us. It may be excusable, therefore, if we divert this narrative from its original historical significance, and use it as the mirror in which we may see reflected an important passage or crisis in our own spiritual history. For though some may find

in it little that reflects their own experience, others cannot fail to be reminded of feelings with which they were very familiar when first they were introduced to Christ, and acknowledged by Him.

1. The modes in which our Lord makes Himself known to men are various as their lives and characters. But frequently the forerunning choice of a sinner by Christ is discovered in such gradual and ill-understood dealings as Joseph used with those brethren. It is the closing of a net around them. They do not see what is driving them forward, nor whither they are being driven; they are anxious and ill at ease; and not comprehending what ails them, they make only ineffectual efforts for deliverance. There is no recognition of the hand that is guiding all this circuitous and mysterious preparatory work, nor of the eye that affectionately watches their perplexity, nor are they aware of any friendly ear that catches each sigh in which they seem hopelessly to resign themselves to the relentless past from which they cannot escape. They feel that they are left alone to make what they can now of the life they have chosen and made for themselves; that there is floating behind and around them a cloud bearing the very essence exhaled from their past, and ready to burst over them; a phantom that is yet real, and that belongs both to the spiritual and material world, and can follow them in either. They seem to be doomed men—men who are never at all to get disentangled from their old sin.

If any one is in this baffled and heartless condition, fearing even good lest it turn to evil in his hand; afraid to take the money that lies in his sack's mouth, because he feels there is a snare in it; if any one is sensible that life has become unmanageable in his hands, and

that he is being drawn on by an unseen power which he does not understand, then let him consider in the scene before us how such a condition ends or may end. It took many months of doubt, and fear, and mystery to bring those brethren to such a state of mind as made it advisable for Joseph to disclose himself, to scatter the mystery, and relieve them of the unaccountable uneasiness that possessed their minds. And your perplexity will not be allowed to last longer than it is needful. But it is often needful that we should first learn that in sinning we have introduced into our life a baffling, perplexing element, have brought our life into connection with inscrutable laws which we cannot control, and which we feel may at any moment destroy us utterly. It is not from carelessness on Christ's part that His people are not always and from the first rejoicing in the assurance and appreciation of His love. It is His carefulness which lays a restraining hand on the ardour of His affection. We see that this burst of tears on Joseph's part was genuine, we have no suspicion that he was feigning an emotion he did not feel; we believe that his affection at last could not be restrained, that he was fairly overcome,—can we not trust Christ for as genuine a love, and believe that His emotion is as deep? We are, in a word, reminded by this scene, that there is always in Christ a greater love seeking the friendship of the sinner than there is in the sinner seeking for Christ. The search of the sinner for Christ is always a dubious, hesitating, uncertain groping; while on Christ's part there is a clear-seeing, affectionate solicitude which lays joyful surprises along the sinner's path, and enjoys by anticipation the gladness and repose which are prepared for him in the final recognition and reconcilement.

2. In finding their brother again, those sons of Jacob found also their own better selves which they had long lost. They had been living in a lie, unable to look the past in the face, and so becoming more and more false. Trying to leave their sin behind them, they always found it rising in the path before them, and again they had to resort to some new mode of laying this uneasy ghost. They turned away from it, busied themselves among other people, refused to think of it, assumed all kinds of disguise, professed to themselves that they had done no great wrong; but nothing gave them deliverance—there was their old sin quietly waiting for them in their tent door when they went home of an evening, laying its hand on their shoulder in the most unlooked-for places, and whispering in their ear at the most unwelcome seasons. A great part of their mental energy had been spent in deleting this mark from their memory, and yet day by day it resumed its supreme place in their life, holding them under arrest as they secretly felt, and keeping them reserved to judgment.

So, too, do many of us live as if yet we had not found the life eternal, the kind of life that we can always go on with—rather as those who are but making the best of a life which can never be very valuable, nor ever perfect. There seem voices calling us back, assuring us we must yet retrace our steps, that there are passages in our past with which we are not done, that there is an inevitable humiliation and penitence awaiting us. It is through that we can alone get back to the good we once saw and hoped for; there were right desires and resolves in us once, views of a well-spent life which have been forgotten and pressed out of remembrance, but all these rise again in the presence of Christ. Reconciled to Him and claimed by Him,

all hope is renewed within us. If He makes Himself known to us, if He claims connection with us, have we not here the promise of all good? If He, after careful scrutiny, after full consideration of all the circumstances, bids us claim as our brother Him to whom all power and glory are given, ought not this to quicken within us everything that is hopeful, and ought it not to strengthen us for all frank acknowledgment of the past and true humiliation on account of it?

3. A third suggestion is made by this narrative. Joseph commanded from his presence all who might be merely curious spectators of his burst of feeling, and might, themselves unmoved, criticise this new feature of the governor's character. In all love there is a similar reserve. The true friend of Christ, the man who is profoundly conscious that between himself and Christ there is a bond unique and eternal, longs for a time when he may enjoy greater liberty in uttering what he feels towards his Lord and Redeemer, and when, too, Christ Himself shall by telling and sufficient signs put it for ever beyond doubt that this love is more than responded to. Words sufficiently impassioned have indeed been put into our lips by men of profound spiritual feeling, but the feeling continually weighs upon us that some more palpable mutual recognition is desirable between persons so vitally and peculiarly knit together as Christ and the Christian are. Such recognition, indubitable and reciprocal, must one day take place. And when Christ Himself shall have taken the initiative, and shall have caused us to understand that we are verily the objects of His love, and shall have given such expression to His knowledge of us as we cannot now receive, we on our part shall be able to reciprocate, or at least to accept, this greatest

of possessions, the brotherly love of the Son of God. Meanwhile this passage in Joseph's history may remind us that behind all sternness of expression there may pulsate a tenderness that needs thus to disguise itself; and that to those who have not yet recognised Christ, He is better than He seems. Those brethren no doubt wonder now that even twenty years' alienation should have so blinded them. The relaxation of the expression from the sternness of an Egyptian governor to the fondness of family love, the voice heard now in the familiar mother tongue, reveal the brother; and they who have shrunk from Christ as if He were a cold official, and who have never lifted their eyes to scrutinize His face, are reminded that He can so make Himself known to them that not all the wealth of Egypt would purchase from them one of the assurances they have received from Him.

The same warm tide of feeling which carried away all that separated Joseph from his brethren bore him on also to the decision to invite his father's entire household into Egypt. We are reminded that the history of Joseph in Egypt is an episode, and that Jacob is still the head of the house, maintaining its dignity and guiding its movements. The notices we get of him in this latter part of his history are very characteristic. The indomitable toughness of his youth remained with him in his old age. He was one of those old men who maintain their vigour to the end, the energy of whose age seems to shame and overtax the prime of common men; whose minds are still the clearest, their advice the safest, their word waited for, their perception of the actual state of affairs always in advance of their juniors, more modern and fully abreast of the times in their ideas than the latest born of their children. Such

an old age we recognise in Jacob's half-scornful chiding of the helplessness of his sons even after they had heard that there was corn in Egypt. "Why look ye one upon another? Behold! I have heard that there is corn in Egypt; get ye down thither and buy for us from thence." Jacob, the man who had wrestled through life and bent all things to his will, cannot put up with the helpless dejection of this troop of strong men, who have no wit to devise an escape for themselves, and no resolution to enforce upon the others any device that may occur to them. Waiting still like children for some one else to help them, having strength to endure but no strength to undertake the responsibility of advising in an emergency, they are roused by their father, who has been eyeing this condition of theirs with some curiosity and with some contempt, and now breaks in upon it with his "Why look ye one upon another?" It is the old Jacob, full of resources, prompt and imperturbable, equal to every turn of fortune, and never knowing how to yield.

Even more clearly do we see the vigour of Jacob's old age when he comes in contact with Joseph. For many years Joseph had been accustomed to command; he had unusual natural sagacity and a special gift of insight from God, but he seems a child in comparison with Jacob. When he brings his two sons to get their grandfather's blessing, Jacob sees what Joseph has no inkling of, and peremptorily declines to follow the advice of his wise son. With all Joseph's sagacity there were points in which his blind father saw more clearly than he. Joseph, who could teach the Egyptian senators wisdom, standing thus at a loss even to understand his father, and suggesting in his ignorance futile corrections, is a picture of the incapacity of natural affection

to rise to the wisdom of God's love, and of the finest natural discernment to anticipate God's purposes or supply the place of a lifelong experience.

Jacob's warm-heartedness has also survived the chills and shocks of a long lifetime. He clings now to Benjamin as once he clung to Joseph. And as he had wrought for Rachel fourteen years, and the love he bare to her made them seem but a few days, so for twenty years now had he remembered Joseph who had inherited this love, and he shows by his frequent reference to him that he was keeping his word and going down to the grave mourning for his son. To such a man it must have been a severe trial indeed to be left alone in his tents, deprived of all his twelve sons; and we hear his old faith in God steadying the voice that yet trembles with emotion as he says, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." It was a trial not, indeed, so painful as that of Abraham when he lifted the knife over the life of his only son; but it was so similar to it as inevitably to suggest it to the mind. Jacob also had to yield up all his children, and to feel, as he sat solitary in his tent, how utterly dependent upon God he was for their restoration; that it was not he but God alone who could build the house of Israel.

The anxiety with which he gazed evening after evening towards the setting sun, to descry the returning caravan, was at last relieved. But his joy was not altogether unalloyed. His sons brought with them a summons to shift the patriarchal encampment into Egypt—a summons which evidently nothing would have induced Jacob to respond to had it not come from his long-lost Joseph, and had it not thus received what he felt to be a divine sanction. The extreme reluctance which Jacob showed to the journey, we must be careful

to refer to its true source. The Asiatics, and especially shepherd tribes, move easily. One who thoroughly knows the East says: "The Oriental is not afraid to go far, if he has not to cross the sea; for, once uprooted, distance makes little difference to him. He has no furniture to carry, for, except a carpet and a few brass pans, he uses none. He has no trouble about meals, for he is content with parched grain, which his wife can cook anywhere, or dried dates, or dried flesh, or anything obtainable which will keep. He is, on a march, careless where he sleeps, provided his family are around him—in a stable, under a porch, in the open air. He never changes his clothes at night, and he is profoundly indifferent to everything that the Western man understands by 'comfort.'" But there was in Jacob's case a peculiarity. He was called upon to abandon, for an indefinite period, the land which God had given him as the heir of His promise. With very great toil and not a little danger had Jacob won his way back to Canaan from Mesopotamia; on his return he had spent the best years of his life, and now he was resting there in his old age, having seen his children's children, and expecting nothing but a peaceful departure to his fathers. But suddenly the wagons of Pharaoh stand at his tent-door, and while the parched and bare pastures bid him go to the plenty of Egypt, to which the voice of his long-lost son invites him, he hears a summons which, however trying, he cannot disregard.

Such an experience is perpetually reproduced. Many are they who having at length received from God some long-expected good are quickly summoned to relinquish it again. And while the waiting for what seems indispensable to us is trying, it is tenfold more so to have

to part with it when at last obtained, and obtained at the cost of much besides. That particular arrangement of our worldly circumstances which we have long sought, we are almost immediately thrown out of. That position in life, or that object of desire, which God Himself seems in many ways to have encouraged us to seek, is taken from us almost as soon as we have tasted its sweetness. The cup is dashed from our lips at the very moment when our thirst was to be fully slaked. In such distressing circumstances we cannot *see* the end God is aiming at; but of this we may be certain, that He does not wantonly annoy, or relish our discomfiture, and that when we are compelled to resign what is partial, it is that we may one day enjoy what is complete, and that if for the present we have to forego much comfort and delight, this is only an absolutely necessary step towards our permanent establishment in all that can bless and prosper us.

It is this state of feeling which explains the words of Jacob when introduced to Pharaoh. A recent writer, who spent some years on the banks of the Nile and on its waters, and who mixed freely with the inhabitants of Egypt, says: "Old Jacob's speech to Pharaoh really made me laugh, because it is so exactly like what a Fellah says to a Pacha, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been,' Jacob being a most prosperous man, but it is manners to say all that." But Eastern manners need scarcely be called in to explain a sentiment which we find repeated by one who is generally esteemed the most self-sufficing of Europeans. "I have ever been esteemed," Goethe says, "one of Fortune's chiefest favourites; nor will I complain or find fault with the course my life has taken. Yet, truly, there has been nothing but toil and care;

and I may say that, in all my seventy-five years, I have never had a month of genuine comfort. It has been the perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew." Jacob's life had been almost ceaseless disquiet and disappointment. A man who had fled his country, who had been cheated into a marriage, who had been compelled by his own relative to live like a slave, who was only by flight able to save himself from a perpetual injustice, whose sons made his life bitter,—one of them by the foulest outrage a father could suffer, two of them by making him, as he himself said, to stink in the nostrils of the inhabitants of the land he was trying to settle in, and all of them by conspiring to deprive him of the child he most dearly loved—a man who at last, when he seemed to have had experience of every form of human calamity, was compelled by famine to relinquish the land for the sake of which he had endured all and spent all, might surely be forgiven a little plaintiveness in looking back upon his past. The wonder is to find Jacob to the end unbroken, dignified, and clear-seeing, capable and commanding, loving and full of faith.

Cordial as the reconciliation between Joseph and his brethren seemed, it was not as thorough as might have been desired. So long, indeed, as Jacob lived, all went well; but "when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." No wonder Joseph wept when he received their message. He wept because he saw that he was still misunderstood and distrusted by his brethren; because he felt, too, that had they been more generous men themselves, they would more easily have believed in his forgiveness; and because his pity was

stirred for these men, who recognised that they were so completely in the power of their younger brother. Joseph had passed through severe conflicts of feeling about them, had been at great expense both of emotion and of outward good on their account, had risked his position in order to be able to serve them, and here is his reward! They supposed he had been but biding his time, that his apparent forgetfulness of their injury had been the crafty restraint of a deep-seated resentment; or, at best, that he had been unconsciously influenced by regard for his father, and now, when that influence was removed, the helpless condition of his brethren might tempt him to retaliate. This exhibition of a craven and suspicious spirit is unexpected, and must have been profoundly saddening to Joseph. Yet here, as elsewhere, he is magnanimous. Pity for them turns his thoughts from the injustice done to himself. He comforts them, and speaks kindly to them, saying, Fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones.

Many painful thoughts must have been suggested to Joseph by this conduct. If, after all he had done for his brethren, they had not yet learned to love him, but met his kindness with suspicion, was it not probable that underneath his apparent popularity with the Egyptians there might lie envy, or the cold acknowledgment that falls far short of love? This sudden disclosure of the real feeling of his brethren towards him must necessarily have made him uneasy about his other friendships. Did every one merely make use of him, and did no one give him pure love for his own sake? The people he had saved from famine, was there one of them that regarded him with anything resembling personal affection? Distrust seemed to pursue Joseph from first to last. First his own family misunderstood

and persecuted him. Then his Egyptian master had returned his devoted service with suspicion and imprisonment. And now again, after sufficient time for testing his character might seem to have elapsed, he was still looked upon with distrust by those who of all others had best reason to believe in him. But though Joseph had through all his life been thus conversant with suspicion, cruelty, falsehood, ingratitude, and blindness, though he seemed doomed to be always misread, and to have his best deeds made the ground of accusation against him, he remained not merely unsoured, but equally ready as ever to be of service to all. The finest natures may be disconcerted and deadened by universal distrust; characters not naturally unamiable are sometimes embittered by suspicion; and persons who are in the main high-minded do stoop, when stung by such treatment, to rail at the world, or to question all generous emotion, steadfast friendship, or unimpeachable integrity. In Joseph there is nothing of this. If ever man had a right to complain of being unappreciated, it was he; if ever man was tempted to give up making sacrifices for his relatives, it was he. But through all this he bore himself with manly generosity, with simple and persistent faith, with a dignified respect for himself and for other men. In the ingratitude and injustice he had to endure, he only found opportunity for a deeper unselfishness, a more God-like forbearance. And that such may be the outcome of the sorest parts of human experience we have one day or other need to remember. When our good is evil spoken of, our motives suspected, our most sincere sacrifices scrutinized by an ignorant and malicious spirit, our most substantial and well-judged acts of kindness received with suspicion, and the love that is

in them quite rejected, it is then we have opportunity to show that to us belongs the Christian temper that can pardon till seventy times seven, and that can persist in loving where love meets no response, and benefits provoke no gratitude.

How Joseph spent the years which succeeded the famine we have no means of knowing; but the closing act of his life seemed to the narrator so significant as to be worthy of record. "Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." The Egyptians must have chiefly been struck by the simplicity of character which this request betokened. To the great benefactors of our country, the highest award is reserved to be given after death. So long as a man lives, some rude stroke of fortune or some disastrous error of his own may blast his fame; but when his bones are laid with those who have served their country best, a seal is set on his life, and a sentence pronounced which the revision of posterity rarely revokes. Such honours were customary among the Egyptians; it is from their tombs that their history can now be written. And to none were such honours more accessible than to Joseph. But after a life in the service of the state he retains the simplicity of the Hebrew lad. With the magnanimity of a great and pure soul, he passed uncontaminated through the flatteries and temptations of court-life; and, like Moses, "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." He has not indulged in any affectation of simplicity, nor has he, in the pride that apes humility, declined

the ordinary honours due to a man in his position. He wears the badges of office, the robe and the gold necklace, but these things do not reach his spirit. He has lived in a region in which such honours make no deep impression; and in his death he shows where his heart has been. The small voice of God, spoken centuries ago to his forefathers, deafens him to the loud acclaim with which the people do him homage.

By later generations this dying request of Joseph's was looked upon as one of the most remarkable instances of faith. For many years there had been no new revelation. The rising generations that had seen no man with whom God had spoken, were little interested in the land which was said to be theirs, but which they very well knew was infested by fierce tribes who, on at least one occasion during this period, inflicted disastrous defeat on one of the boldest of their own tribes. They were, besides, extremely attached to the country of their adoption; they luxuriated in its fertile meadows and teeming gardens, which kept them supplied at little cost of labour with delicacies unknown on the hills of Canaan. This oath, therefore, which Joseph made them swear, may have revived the drooping hopes of the small remnant who had any of his own spirit. They saw that he, their most sagacious man, lived and died in full assurance that God would visit His people. And through all the terrible bondage they were destined to suffer, the bones of Joseph, or rather his embalmed body, stood as the most eloquent advocate of God's faithfulness, ceaselessly reminding the despondent generations of the oath which God would yet enable them to fulfil. As often as they felt inclined to give up all hope and the last surviving Israelitish peculiarity, there was the unburied coffin remon-

strating; Joseph still, even when dead, refusing to let his dust mingle with Egyptian earth.

And thus, as Joseph had been their pioneer who broke out a way for them into Egypt, so did he continue to hold open the gate and point the way back to Canaan. The brethren had sold him into this foreign land, meaning to bury him for ever; he retaliated by requiring that the tribes should restore him to the land from which he had been expelled. Few men have opportunity of showing so noble a revenge; fewer still, having the opportunity, would so have used it. Jacob had been carried up to Canaan as soon as he was dead: Joseph declines this exceptional treatment, and prefers to share the fortunes of his brethren, and will then only enter on the promised land when all his people can go with him. As in life, so in death, he took a large view of things, and had no feeling that the world ended in him. His career had taught him to consider national interests; and now, on his death-bed, it is from the point of view of his people that he looks at the future.

Several passages in the life of Joseph have shown us that where the Spirit of Christ is present, many parts of the conduct will suggest, if they do not actually resemble, acts in the life of Christ. The attitude towards the future in which Joseph sets his people as he leaves them, can scarcely fail to suggest the attitude which Christians are called to assume. The prospect which the Hebrews had of fulfilling their oath grew increasingly faint, but the difficulties in the way of its performance must only have made them more clearly see that they depended on God for entrance on the promised inheritance. And so may the difficulty of our duties as Christ's followers measure for us the amount of grace God has provided for us. The commands that

make you sensible of your weakness, and bring to light more clearly than ever how unfit for good you are, are witnesses to you that God will visit you and enable you to fulfil the oath He has required you to take. The children of Israel could not suppose that a man so wise as Joseph had ended his life with a childish folly, when he made them swear this oath, and could not but renew their hope that the day would come when his wisdom would be justified by their ability to discharge it. Neither ought it to be beyond our belief that, in requiring from us such and such conduct, our Lord has kept in view our actual condition and its possibilities, and that His commands are our best guide towards a state of permanent felicity. He that aims always at the performance of the oath he has taken, will assuredly find that God will not stultify Himself by failing to support him.

XXXI.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE TRIBES.

GENESIS xlviii. and xlix.

JACOB'S blessing of his sons marks the close of the patriarchal dispensation. Henceforth the channel of God's blessing to man does not consist of one person only, but of a people or nation. It is still *one seed*, as Paul reminds us, a unit that God will bless, but this unit is now no longer a single person—as Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob—but one people, composed of several parts, and yet one whole; equally representative of Christ, as the patriarchs were, and of equal effect every way in receiving God's blessing and handing it down until Christ came. The Old Testament Church, quite as truly as the New, formed one whole with Christ. Apart from Him it had no meaning, and would have had no existence. It was the promised seed, always growing more and more to its perfect development in Christ. As the promise was kept to Abraham when Isaac was born, and as Isaac was truly the promised seed—in so far as he was a part of the series that led on to Christ, and was given in fulfilment of the promise that promised Christ to the world—so all through the history of Israel we must bear in mind that in them God is fulfilling this same promise, and that they are the promised seed in so far as they are one with Christ.

And this interprets to us all those passages of the prophets regarding which men have disputed whether they are to be applied to Israel or to Christ: passages in which God addresses Israel in such words as, "Behold My servant," "Mine elect," and so forth, and in the interpretation of which it has been thought sufficient proof that they do not apply to Christ, to prove that they do apply to Israel; whereas, on the principle just laid down, it might much more safely be argued that because they apply to Israel, therefore they apply to Christ. And it is at this point—where Israel distributes among his sons the blessing which heretofore had all lodged in himself—that we see the first multiplication of Christ's representatives; the mediation going on no longer through individuals, but through a nation; and where individuals are still chosen by God, as commonly they are, for the conveyance of God's communications to earth, these individuals, whether priests or prophets, are themselves but the official representatives of the nation.

As the patriarchal dispensation ceases, it secures to the tribes all the blessing it has itself contained. Every father desires to leave to his sons whatever he has himself found helpful, but as they gather round his dying bed, or as he sits setting his house in order, and considering what portion is appropriate for each, he recognises that to some of them it is quite useless to bequeath the most valuable parts of his property, while in others he discerns a capacity which promises the improvement of all that is entrusted to it. And from the earliest times the various characters of the tribes were destined to modify the blessing conveyed to them by their father. The blessing of Israel is now distributed, and each receives what each can take; and

while in some of the individual tribes there may seem to be very little of blessing at all, yet, taken together, they form a picture of the common outstanding features of human nature, and of that nature as acted upon by God's blessing, and forming together one body or Church. A peculiar interest attaches to the history of some nations, and is not altogether absent from our own, from the precision with which we can trace the character of families, descending often with the same unmistakable lineaments from father to son for many generations.* One knows at once to what families to look for restless and turbulent spirits, ready for conspiracy and revolution; and one knows also where to seek steady and faithful loyalty, public-spiritedness, or native ability. And in Israel's national character there was room for the great distinguishing features of the tribes, and to show the richness and variety with which the promise of God could fulfil itself wherever it was received. The distinguishing features which Jacob depicts in the blessings of his sons are necessarily veiled under the poetic figures of prophecy, and spoken of as they would reveal themselves in worldly matters; but these features were found in all the generations of the tribes, and displayed themselves in things spiritual also. For a man has not two characters, but one; and what he is in the world, that he is in his religion. In our own country, it is seen how the forms of worship, and even the doctrines believed, and certainly the modes of religious thought and feeling, depend on the natural character, and the natural character on the local situation of the respective sections of the community. No doubt in a country like ours, where men so constantly

* Merivale's *Romans under the Empire*, vi. 261.

migrate from place to place, and where one common literature tends to mould us all to the same way of thinking, you do get men of all kinds in every place; yet even among ourselves the character of a place is generally still visible, and predominates over all that mingles with it. Much more must this character have been retained in a country where each man could trace his ancestry up to the father of the tribe, and cultivated with pride the family characteristics, and had but little intercourse, either literary or personal, with other minds and other manners. As we know by dialect and by the manners of the people when we pass into a new country, so must the Israelite have known by the eye and ear when he had crossed the county frontier, when he was conversing with a Benjamite, and when with a descendant of Judah. We are not therefore to suppose that any of these utterances of Jacob are mere geographical predictions, or that they depict characteristics which might appear in civil life, but not in religion and the Church, or that they would die out with the first generation.

In these blessings, therefore, we have the history of the Church in its most interesting form. In these sons gathered round him, the patriarch sees his own nature reflected piece by piece, and he sees also the general outline of all that must be produced by such natures as these men have. The whole destiny of Israel is here in germ, and the spirit of prophecy in Jacob sees and declares it. It has often been remarked* that as a man draws near to death, he seems to see many things in a much clearer light, and especially gets glimpses into the future, which are hidden from others.

* Plato, *Repub.* i. 5, etc.

> "The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that time hath made."

Being nearer to eternity, he instinctively measures things by its standard, and thus comes nearer a just valuation of all things before his mind, and can better distinguish reality from appearance. Jacob has studied these sons of his for fifty years, and has had his acute perception of character painfully enough called to exercise itself on them. He has all his life long had a liking for analysing men's inner life, knowing that, when he understands that, he can better use them for his own ends; and these sons of his own have cost him thought enough over and above that sometimes penetrating interest which a father will take in the growth of a son's character; and now he knows them thoroughly, understands their temptations, their weaknesses, their capabilities, and, as a wise head of a house, can, with delicate and unnoticed skill, balance the one against the other, ward off awkward collisions, and prevent the evil from destroying the good. This knowledge of Jacob prepares him for being the intelligent agent by whom God predicts in outline the future of His Church.

One cannot but admire, too, the faith which enables Jacob to apportion to his sons the blessings of a land which had not been much of a resting-place to himself, and regarding the occupation of which his sons might have put to him some very difficult questions. And we admire this dignified faith the more on reflecting that it has often been very grievously lacking in our own case —that we have felt almost ashamed of having so little of a present tangible kind to offer, and of being obliged to speak only of invisible and future blessings; to set a spiritual consolation over against a worldly grief; to

point a man whose fortunes are ruined to an eternal inheritance; or to speak to one who knows himself quite in the power of sin of a remedy which has often seemed illusory to ourselves. Some of us have got so little comfort or strength from religion ourselves, that we have no heart to offer it to others; and most of us have a feeling that we should seem to trifle were we to offer invisible aid against very visible calamity. At least we feel that we are doing a daring thing in making such an offer, and can scarce get over the desire that we had something to speak of which sight could appreciate, and which did not require the exercise of faith. Again and again the wish rises within us that to the sick man we could bring health as well as the promise of forgiveness, and that to the poor we could grant an earthly, while we make known a heavenly, inheritance. One who has experienced these scruples, and known how hard it is to get rid of them, will know also how to honour the faith of Jacob, by which he assumes the right to bless Pharaoh—though he is himself a mere sojourner by sufferance in Pharaoh's land, and living on his bounty—and by which he gathers his children round him and portions out to them a land which seemed to have been most barren to himself, and which now seemed quite beyond his reach. The enjoyments of it, which he himself had not very deeply tasted, he yet knew were real; and if there were a look of scepticism, or of scorn, on the face of any one of his sons; if the unbelief of any received the prophetic utterances as the ravings of delirium, or the fancies of an imbecile and worn-out mind going back to the scenes of its youth, in Jacob himself there was so simple and unsuspecting a faith in God's promise, that he dealt with the land as if it

were the only portion worth bequeathing to his sons, as if every Canaanite were already cast out of it, and as if he knew his sons could never be tempted by the wealth of Egypt to turn with contempt from the land of promise. And if we would attain to this boldness of his, and be able to speak of spiritual and future blessings as very substantial and valuable, we must ourselves learn to make much of God's promise, and leave no taint of unbelief in our reception of it.

And often we are rebuked by finding that when we do offer things spiritual, even those who are wrapped in earthly comforts appreciate and accept the better gifts. So it was in Joseph's case. No doubt the highest posts in Egypt were open to his sons; they might have been naturalised, as he himself had been, and, throwing in their lot with the land of their adoption, might have turned to their advantage the rank their father held, and the reputation he had earned. But Joseph turns from this attractive prospect, brings them to his father, and hands them over to the despised shepherd-life of Israel. One need scarcely point out how great a sacrifice this was on Joseph's part. So universally acknowledged and legitimate a desire is it to pass to one's children the honour achieved by a life of exertion, that states have no higher rewards to confer on their most useful servants than a title which their descendants may wear. But Joseph would not suffer his children to risk the loss of their share in God's peculiar blessing, not for the most promising openings in life, or the highest civil honours. If the thoroughly open identification of them with the shepherds, and their profession of a belief in a distant inheritance, which must have made them appear madmen in the eyes of the Egyptians, if this was to cut

them off from worldly advancement, Joseph was not careful of this, for resolved he was that, at any cost, they should be among God's people. And his faith received its reward; the two tribes that sprang from him received about as large a portion of the promised land as fell to the lot of all the other tribes put together.

You will observe that Ephraim and Manasseh were adopted as sons of Jacob. Jacob tells Joseph, "They shall be mine," not my grandsons, but as Reuben and Simeon. No other sons whom Joseph might have were to be received into this honour, but these two were to take their place on a level with their uncles as heads of tribes, so that Joseph is represented through the whole history by the two populous and powerful tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. No greater honour could have been put on Joseph, nor any more distinct and lasting recognition made of the indebtedness of his family to him, and of how he had been as a father bringing new life to his brethren, than this, that his sons should be raised to the rank of heads of tribes, on a level with the immediate sons of Jacob. And no higher honour could have been put on the two lads themselves than that they should thus be treated as if they were their father Joseph—as if they had his worth and his rank. He is merged in them, and all that he has earned is, throughout the history, to be found, not in his own name, but in theirs. It all proceeds from him; but his enjoyment is found in their enjoyment, his worth acknowledged in their fruitfulness. Thus did God familiarise the Jewish mind through its whole history with the idea, if they chose to think and have ideas, of adoption, and of an adoption of a peculiar kind, of an adoption where already there was an heir

who, by this adoption, has his name and worth merged in the persons now received into his place. Ephraim and Manasseh were not received alongside of Joseph, but each received what Joseph himself might have had, and Joseph's name as a tribe was henceforth only to be found in these two. This idea was fixed in such a way, that for centuries it was steeping into the minds of men, so that they might not be astonished if God should in some other case, say the case of His own Son, adopt men into the rank He held, and let His estimate of the worth of His Son, and the honour He puts upon Him, be seen in the adopted. This being so, we need not be alarmed if men tell us that imputation is a mere legal fiction, or human invention; a legal fiction it may be, but in the case before us it was the never-disputed foundation of very substantial blessings to Ephraim and Manasseh; and we plead for nothing more than that God would act with us as here He did act with these two, that He would make us His direct heirs, make us His own sons, and give us what He who presents us to Him to receive His blessing did earn, and merits at the Father's hand.

We meet with these crossed hands of blessing frequently in Scripture; the younger son blessed above the elder—as was needful, lest grace should become confounded with nature, and the belief gradually grow up in men's minds that natural effects could never be overcome by grace, and that in every respect grace waited upon nature. And these crossed hands we meet still; for how often does God quite reverse *our* order, and bless most that about which we had less concern, and seem to put a slight on that which has engrossed our best affection. It is so, often in precisely the way in which Joseph found it so; the son whose

youth is most anxiously cared for, to whom the interests of the younger members of the family are sacrificed, and who is commended to God continually to receive His right-hand blessing, this son seems neither to receive nor to dispense much blessing; but the younger, less thought of, left to work his own way, is favoured by God, and becomes the comfort and support of his parents when the elder has failed of his duty. And in the case of much that we hold dear, the same rule is seen; a pursuit we wish to be successful in we can make little of, and are thrown back from continually, while something else into which we have thrown ourselves almost accidentally prospers in our hand and blesses us. Again and again, for years together, we put forward some cherished desire to God's right hand, and are displeased, like Joseph, that still the hand of greater blessing should pass to some other thing. Does God not know what is oldest with us, what has been longest at our hearts, and is dearest to us? Certainly He does: "I know it, My son, I know it," He answers to all our expostulations. It is not because He does not understand or regard your predilections, your natural and excusable preferences, that He sometimes refuses to gratify your whole desire, and pours upon you blessings of a kind somewhat different from those you most earnestly covet. He will give you the whole that Christ hath merited; but for the application and distribution of that grace and blessing you must be content to trust Him. You may be at a loss to know why He does no more to deliver you from some sin, or why He does not make you more successful in your efforts to aid others, or why, while He so liberally prospers you in one part of your condition, you get so much less in another that is far

nearer your heart; but God does what He will with His own, and if you do not find in one point the whole blessing and prosperity you think should flow from such a Mediator as you have, you may only conclude that what is lacking there will elsewhere be found more wisely bestowed. And is it not a perpetual encouragement to us that God does not merely crown what nature has successfully begun, that it is not the likely and the naturally good that are most blessed, but that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are?

In Reuben, the first-born, conscience must have been sadly at war with hope as he looked at the blind, but expressive, face of his father. He may have hoped that his sin had not been severely thought of by his father, or that the father's pride in his first-born would prompt him to hide, though it could not make him forget it. Probably the gross offence had not been made known to the family. At least, the words "he went up" may be understood as addressed in explanation to the brethren. It may indeed have been that the blind old man, forcibly recalling the long-past transgression, is here uttering a mournful, regretful soliloquy, rather than addressing any one. It may be that these words were uttered to himself as he went back upon the one deed that had disclosed to him his son's real character, and rudely hurled to the ground all the hopes he had built up for his first-born. Yet there is no reason to suppose, on the other hand, that the sin had been previously known or alluded to in the

family. Reuben's hasty, passionate nature could not understand that if Jacob had felt that sin of his deeply, he should not have shown his resentment; he had stunned his father with the heavy blow, and because he did not cry out and strike him in return, he thought him little hurt. So do shallow natures tremble for a night after their sin, and when they find that the sun rises and men greet them as cordially as before, and that no hand lays hold on them from the past, they think little more of their sin—do not understand that fatal calm that precedes the storm. Had the memory of Reuben's sin survived in Jacob's mind all the sad events that had since happened, and all the stirring incidents of the emigration and the new life in Egypt? Could his father at the last hour, and after so many thronged years, and before his brethren, recall the old sin? He is relieved and confirmed in his confidence by the first words of Jacob, words ascribing to him his natural position, a certain conspicuous dignity too, and power such as one may often see produced in men by occupying positions of authority, though in their own character there be weakness. But all the excellence that Jacob ascribes to Reuben serves only to embitter the doom pronounced upon him. Men seem often to expect that a future can be *given* to them irrespective of what they themselves are, that a series of blessings and events might be prepared for them, and made over to them; whereas every man's future must be made by himself, and is already in great part formed by the past. It was a vain expectation of Reuben to expect that he, the impetuous, unstable, superficial son, could have the future of a deep, and earnest, and dutiful nature, or that his children should derive no taint from their parent, but be as the children of Joseph. No man's

future need be altogether a doom to him, for God may bless to him the evil fruit his life has borne; but certainly no man need look for a future which has no relation to his own character. His future will always be made up of *his* deeds, *his* feelings, and the circumstances which *his* desires have brought him into.

The future of Reuben was of a negative, blank kind —"Thou shalt *not* excel;" his unstable character must empty it of all great success. And to many a heart since have these words struck a chill, for to many they are as a mirror suddenly held up before them. They see themselves when they look on the tossing sea, rising and pointing to the heavens with much noise, but only to sink back again to the same everlasting level. Men of brilliant parts and great capacity are continually seen to be lost to society by instability of purpose. Would they only pursue one direction, and concentrate their energies on one subject, they might become true heirs of promise, blessed and blessing; but they seem to lose relish for every pursuit on the first taste of success—all their energy seems to have boiled over and evaporated in the first glow, and sinks as the water that has just been noisily boiling when the fire is withdrawn from under it. No impression made upon them is permanent: like water, they are plastic, easily impressible, but utterly incapable of retaining an impression; and therefore, like water, they have a downward tendency, or at the best are but retained in their place by pressure from without, and have no eternal power of growth. And the misery of this character is often increased by the *desire* to excel which commonly accompanies instability. It is generally this very desire which prompts a man to hurry from one aim to another, to give up one path to excel-

lence when he sees that other men are making way upon another: having no internal convictions of his own, he is guided mostly by the successes of other men, the most dangerous of all guides. So that such a man has all the bitterness of an eager desire doomed never to be satisfied. Conscious to himself of capacity for something, feeling in him the excellency of power, and having that "excellency of dignity," or graceful and princely refinement, which the knowledge of many things, and intercourse with many kinds of people, have imparted to him, he feels all the more that pervading weakness, that greedy, lustful craving for all kinds of priority, and for enjoying all the various advantages which other men severally enjoy, which will not let him finally choose and adhere to his own line of things, but distracts him by a thousand purposes which ever defeat one another.*

The sin of the next oldest sons was also remembered against them, and remembered apparently for the same reason—because the character was expressed in it. The massacre of the Shechemites was not an accidental outrage that any other of the sons of Jacob might equally have perpetrated, but the most glaring of a number of expressions of a fierce and cruel disposition in these two men. In Jacob's prediction of their future, he seems to shrink with horror from his own progeny—like her who dreamt she would give birth to a firebrand. He sees the possibility of the direst results flowing from such a temper, and, under God, provides against these by scattering the tribes, and thus weakening their power for evil. They had been

* The subsequent history of the tribe shows that the character of its father was transmitted. 'No judge, no prophet, not one of the tribe of Reuben, is mentioned." (*Vide* Smith's Dictionary, *Reuben.*)

banded together so as the more easily and securely to accomplish their murderous purposes. "Simeon and Levi are brethren"—showing a close affinity, and seeking one another's society and aid, but it is for bad purposes; and therefore they must be divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel. This was accomplished by the tribe of Levi being distributed over all the other tribes as the ministers of religion. The fiery zeal, the bold independence, and the pride of being a distinct people, which had been displayed in the slaughter of the Shechemites, might be toned down and turned to good account when the sword was taken out of their hand. Qualities such as these, which produce the most disastrous results when fit instruments can be found, and when men of like disposition are suffered to band themselves together, may, when found in the individual and kept in check by circumstances and dissimilar dispositions, be highly beneficial.

In the sin, Levi seems to have been the moving spirit, Simeon the abetting tool, and in the punishment, it is the more dangerous tribe that is scattered, so that the other is left companionless. In the blessings of Moses, the tribe of Simeon is passed over in silence; and that the tribe of Levi should have been so used for God's immediate service stands as evidence that punishments, however severe and desolating, even threatening something bordering on extinction, may yet become blessings to God's people. The sword of murder was displaced in Levi's hand by the knife of sacrifice; their fierce revenge against sinners was converted into hostility against sin; their apparent zeal for the forms of their religion was consecrated to the service of the tabernacle and temple; their fanatical pride, which prompted them to treat all other

people as the offscouring of the earth, was informed by a better spirit, and used for the upbuilding and instruction of the people of Israel. In order to understand why this tribe, of all others, should have been chosen for the service of the sanctuary and for the instruction of the people, we must not only recognise how their being scattered in punishment of their sin over all the land fitted them to be the educators of the nation and the representatives of all the tribes, but also we must consider that the sin itself which Levi had committed broke the one command which men had up till this time received from the mouth of God; no law had as yet been published but that which had been given to Noah and his sons regarding bloodshed, and which was given in circumstances so appalling, and with sanctions so emphatic, that it might ever have rung in men's ears, and stayed the hand of the murderer. In saying, "At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man," God had shown that human life was to be counted sacred. He Himself had swept the race from the face of the earth, but adding this command immediately after, He showed all the more forcibly that punishment was His own prerogative, and that none but those appointed by Him might shed blood—"Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord." To take private revenge, as Levi did, was to take the sword out of God's hand, and to say that God was not careful enough of justice, and but a poor guardian of right and wrong in the world; and to destroy human life in the wanton and cruel manner in which Levi had destroyed the Shechemites, and to do it under colour and by the aid of religious zeal, was to God the most hateful of sins. But none can know the hatefulness of a sin so distinctly as he who has

fallen into it, and is enduring the punishment of it penitently and graciously, and therefore Levi was of all others the best fitted to be entrusted with those sacrificial symbols which set forth the value of all human life, and especially of the life of God's own Son. Very humbling must it have been for the Levite who remembered the history of his tribe to be used by God as the hand of His justice on the victims that were brought in substitution for that which was so precious in the sight of God.

The blessing of Judah is at once the most important and the most difficult to interpret in the series. There is enough in the history of Judah himself, and there is enough in the subsequent history of the tribe, to justify the ascription to him of all lion-like qualities—a kingly fearlessness, confidence, power, and success; in action a rapidity of movement and might that make him irresistible, and in repose a majestic dignity of bearing. As the serpent is the cognisance of Dan, the wolf of Benjamin, the hind of Naphtali, so is the lion of the tribe of Judah. He scorns to gain his end by a serpentine craft, and is himself easily taken in; he does not ravin like a wolf, merely plundering for the sake of booty, but gives freely and generously, even to the sacrifice of his own person: nor has he the mere graceful and ineffective swiftness of the hind, but the rushing onset of the lion—a character which, more than any other, men reverence and admire—"Judah, *thou* art he whom thy brethren shall praise"—and a character which, more than any other, fits a man to take the lead and rule. If there were to be kings in Israel, there could be little doubt from which tribe they could best be chosen; a wolf of the tribe of Benjamin, like Saul, not only hung on the rear of retreating Philistines and

spoiled them, but made a prey of his own people, and it is in David we find the true king, the man who more than any other satisfies men's ideal of the prince to whom they will pay homage;—falling indeed into grievous error and sin, like his forefather, but, like him also, right at heart, so generous and self-sacrificing that men served him with the most devoted loyalty, and were willing rather to dwell in caves with him than in palaces with any other.

The kingly supremacy of Judah was here spoken of in words which have been the subject of as prolonged and violent contention as any others in the Word of God. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." These words are very generally understood to mean that Judah's supremacy would continue until it culminated or flowered into the personal reign of Shiloh; in other words, that Judah's sovereignty was to be perpetuated in the person of Jesus Christ. So that this prediction is but the first whisper of that which was afterwards so distinctly declared, that David's seed should sit on the throne for ever and ever. It was not accomplished in the letter, any more than the promise to David was; the tribe of Judah cannot in any intelligible sense be said to have had rulers of her own up to the coming of Christ, or for some centuries previous to that date. For those who would quickly judge God and His promise by what they could see in their own day, there was enough to provoke them to challenge God for forgetting His promise. But in due time *the* King of men, He to whom all nations have gathered, did spring from this tribe; and need it be said that the very fact of His appearance proved that the supremacy had not departed from Judah? This prediction, then,

partook of the character of very many of the Old Testament prophecies; there was sufficient fulfilment in the letter to seal, as it were, the promise, and give men a token that it was being accomplished, and yet so mysterious a falling short, as to cause men to look beyond the literal fulfilment, on which alone their hopes had at first rested, to some far higher and more perfect spiritual fulfilment.

But not only has it been objected that the sceptre departed from Judah long before Christ came, and that therefore the word Shiloh cannot refer to Him, but also it has been truly said that wherever else the word occurs it is the name of a town—that town, viz., where the ark for a long time was stationed, and from which the allotment of territory was made to the various tribes; and the prediction has been supposed to mean that Judah should be the leading tribe till the land was entered. Many objections to this naturally occur, and need not be stated. But it comes to be an inquiry of some interest, How much information regarding a personal Messiah did the brethren receive from this prophecy? A question very difficult indeed to answer. The word Shiloh means "peace-making," and if they understood this as a proper name, they must have thought of a person such as Isaiah designates as the Prince of Peace—a name it was similar to that wherewith David called his son Solomon, in the expectation that the results of his own lifetime of disorder and battle would be reaped by his successor in a peaceful and prosperous reign. It can scarcely be thought likely, indeed, that this single term "Shiloh," which might be applied to many things besides a person, should give to the sons of Jacob any distinct idea of a personal Deliverer; but it might be sufficient to keep

before their eyes, and specially before the tribe of Judah, that the aim and consummation of all lawgiving and ruling was peace. And there was certainly contained in this blessing an assurance that the purpose of Judah would not be accomplished, and therefore that the existence of Judah as a tribe would not terminate, until peace had been through its means brought into the world: thus was the assurance given, that the productive power of Judah should not fail until out of that tribe there had sprung that which should give peace.

But to us who have seen the prediction accomplished, it plainly enough points to *the* Lion of the tribe of Judah, who in His own person combined all kingly qualities. In Him we are taught by this prediction to discover once more the single Person who stands out on the page of this world's history as satisfying men's ideal of what their King should be, and of how the race should be represented;—the One who without any rival stands in the mind's eye as that for which the best hopes of men were waiting, still feeling that the race could do more than it had done, and never satisfied but in Him.

Zebulun, the sixth and last of Leah's sons, was so called because said Leah, "Now will my husband *dwell with me*" (such being the meaning of the name), "for I have borne him six sons." All that is predicted regarding this tribe is that his *dwelling* should be by the sea, and near the Phœnician city Zidon. This is not to be taken as a strict geographical definition of the tract of country occupied by Zebulun, as we see when we compare it with the lot assigned to it and marked out in the Book of Joshua; but though the border of the tribe did not reach to Zidon, and though it can only

have been a mere tongue of land belonging to it that ran down to the Mediterranean shore, yet the situation ascribed to it is true to its character as a tribe that had commercial relations with the Phœnicians, and was of a decidedly mercantile turn. We find this same feature indicated in the blessing of Moses: "Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy *going out*, and Issachar in thy tents"—Zebulun having the enterprise of a seafaring community, and Issachar the quiet bucolic contentment of an agricultural or pastoral population: Zebulun always restlessly eager for emigration or commerce, for *going out* of one kind or other; Issachar satisfied to live and die in his own tents. It is still, therefore, character rather than geographical position that is here spoken of—though it is a trait of character that is peculiarly dependent on geographical position: we, for example, because islanders, having become the maritime power and the merchants of the world; not being shut off from other nations by the encompassing sea, but finding paths by it equally in all directions ready provided for every kind of traffic.

Zebulun, then, was to represent the commerce of Israel, its *outgoing* tendency; was to supply a means of communication and bond of connection with the world outside, so that through it might be conveyed to the nations what was saving in Israel, and that what Israel needed from other lands might also find entrance. In the Church also, this is a needful quality: for our well-being there must ever exist among us those who are not afraid to launch on the wide and pathless sea of opinion; those in whose ears its waves have from their childhood sounded with a fascinating invitation, and who at last, as if possessed by some spirit of unrest, loose from the firm earth, and go in quest of lands not yet discovered,

or are impelled to see for themselves what till now they have believed on the testimony of others. It is not for all men to quit the shore, and risk themselves in the miseries and disasters of so comfortless and hazardous a life; but happy the people which possesses, from one generation to another, men who must see with their own eyes, and to whose restless nature the discomforts and dangers of an unsettled life have a charm. It is not the instability of Reuben that we have in these men, but the irrepressible longing of the born seaman, who *must* lift the misty veil of the horizon and penetrate its mystery. And we are not to condemn, even when we know we should not imitate, men who cannot rest satisfied with the ground on which we stand, but venture into regions of speculation, of religious thought which we have never trodden, and may deem hazardous. The nourishment we receive is not all native-grown; there are views of truth which may very profitably be imported from strange and distant lands; and there is no land, no province of thought, from which we may not derive what may advantageously be mixed with our own ideas; no direction in which a speculative mind can go in which it may not find something which may give a fresh zest to what we already use, or be a real addition to our knowledge. No doubt men who refuse to confine themselves to one way of viewing truth—men who venture to go close to persons of very different opinions from their own, who determine for themselves to prove all things, who have no very special love for what they were native to and originally taught, who show rather a taste for strange and new opinions—these persons live a life of great hazard, and in the end are generally, like men who have been much at sea, unsettled; they have not fixed opinions,

and are in themselves, as individual men, unsatisfactory and unsatisfied; but still they have done good to the community, by bringing to us ideas and knowledge which otherwise we could not have obtained. Such men God gives us to widen our views; to prevent us from thinking that we have the best of everything; to bring us to acknowledge that others, who perhaps in the main are not so favoured as ourselves, are yet possessed of some things we ourselves would be the better of. And though these men must themselves necessarily hang loosely, scarcely attached very firmly to any part of the Church, like a seafaring population, and often even with a border running very close to heathenism, yet let us own that the Church has need of such—that without them the different sections of the Church would know too little of one another, and too little of the facts of this world's life. And as the seafaring population of a country might be expected to show less interest in the soil of their native land than others, and yet we know that in point of fact we are dependent on no class of our population so much for leal patriotism, and for the defence of our country, so one has observed that the Church also must make similar use of her Zebuluns—of men who, by their very habit of restlessly considering all views of truth which are alien to our own ways of thinking, have become familiar with, and better able to defend us against, the error that mingles with these views.

Issachar receives from his father a character which few would be proud of or would envy, but which many are very content to bear. As the strong ass that has its stall and its provender provided can afford to let the free beasts of the forest vaunt their liberty, so there is a very numerous class of men who have no care to

assert their dignity as human beings, or to agitate regarding their rights as citizens, so long as their obscurity and servitude provide them with physical comforts, and leave them free of heavy responsibilities. They prefer a life of ease and plenty to a life of hardship and glory. They are not lazy nor idle, but are quite willing to use their strength so long as they are not overdriven out of their sleekness. They have neither ambition nor enterprise, and willingly bow their shoulders to bear, and become the servants of those who will free them from the anxiety of planning and managing, and give them a fair and regular remuneration for their labour. This is not a noble nature, but in a world in which ambition so frequently runs through a thorny and difficult path to a disappointing and shameful end, this disposition has much to say in its own defence. It will often accredit itself with unchallengeable common sense, and will maintain that it alone enjoys life and gets the good of it. They will tell you they are the only true utilitarians, that to be one's own master only brings cares, and that the degradation of servitude is only an idea; that *really* servants are quite as well off as masters. Look at them: the one is as a strong, powerful, well-cared-for animal, his work but a pleasant exercise to him, and when it is over never following him into his rest; he eats the good of the land, and has what all seem to be in vain striving for, rest and contentment: the other, the master, has indeed his position, but that only multiplies his duties; he has wealth, but that proverbially only increases his cares and the mouths that are to consume it; it is *he* who has the air of a bondsman, and never, meet him when you may, seems wholly at ease and free from care.

Yet, after all that can be said in favour of the bargain

an Issachar makes, and however he may be satisfied to rest, and in a quiet, peaceful way enjoy life, men feel that at the best there is something despicable about such a character. He gives his labour and is fed, he pays his tribute and is protected; but men feel that they ought to meet the dangers, responsibilities, and difficulties of life in their own persons, and at first hand, and not buy themselves off so from the burden of individual self-control and responsibility. The animal enjoyment of this life and its physical comforts may be a very good ingredient in a national character: it might be well for Israel to have this patient, docile mass of strength in its midst: it may be well for our country that there are among us not only men eager for the highest honours and posts, but a great multitude of men perhaps equally serviceable and capable, but whose desires never rise beyond the ordinary social comforts; the contentedness of such, even though reprehensible, tempers or balances the ambition of the others, and when it comes into personal contact rebukes its feverishness. They, as well as the other parts of society, have amidst their error a truth—the truth that the ideal world in which ambition, and hope, and imagination live is not everything; that the material has also a reality, and that though hope does bless mankind, yet attainment is also something, even though it be a little. Yet this truth is not the whole truth, and is only useful as an ingredient, as a part, not as the whole; and when we fall from any high ideal of human life which we have formed, and begin to find comfort and rest in the mere physical good things of this world, we may well despise ourselves. There is a pleasantness still in the land that appeals to us all; a luxury in observing the risks and struggles of

others while ourselves secure and at rest; a desire to make life easy, and to shirk the responsibility and toil that public-spiritedness entails. Yet of what tribe has the Church more cause to complain than of those persons who seem to imagine that they have done enough when they have joined the Church and received their own inheritance to enjoy; who are alive to no emergency, nor awake to the need of others; who have no idea at all of their being a part of the community, for which, as well as for themselves, there are duties to discharge; who couch, like the ass of Issachar, in their comfort without one generous impulse to make common cause against the common evils and foes of the Church, and are unvisited by a single compunction that while they lie there, submitting to whatever fate sends, there are kindred tribes of their own being oppressed and spoiled?

There seems to have been an improvement in this tribe, an infusion of some new life into it. In the time of Deborah, indeed, it is with a note of surprise that, while celebrating the victory of Israel, she names even Issachar as having been roused to action, and as having helped in the common cause—"the princes of Issachar were with Deborah, *even* Issachar;" but we find them again in the days of David wiping out their reproach, and standing by him manfully. And there an apparently new character is given to them—"the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do." This quite accords, however, with the kind of practical philosophy which we have seen to be imbedded in Issachar's character. Men they were not distracted by high thoughts and ambitions, but who judged things according to their substantial value to themselves; and

who were, therefore, in a position to give much good advice on practical matters—advice which would always have a tendency to trend too much towards mere utilitarianism and worldliness, and to partake rather of crafty politic diplomacy than of far-seeing statesmanship, yet trustworthy for a certain class of subjects. And here, too, they represent the same class in the Church, already alluded to; for one often finds that men who will not interrupt their own comfort, and who have a kind of stolid indifference as to what comes of the good of the Church, have yet also much shrewd practical wisdom; and were these men, instead of spending their sagacity in cynical denunciation of what the Church does, to throw themselves into the cause of the Church, and heartily advise her what she *ought* to do, and help in the doing of it, their observation of human affairs, and political understanding of the times, would be turned to good account, instead of being a reproach.

Next came the eldest son of Rachel's handmaid, and the eldest son of Leah's handmaid, Dan and Gad. Dan's name, meaning "judge," is the starting point of the prediction—"Dan shall judge his people." This word "judge" we are perhaps somewhat apt to misapprehend; it means rather to defend than to sit in judgment on; it refers to a judgment passed between one's own people and their foes, and an execution of such judgment in the deliverance of the people and the destruction of the foe. We are familiar with this meaning of the word by the constant reference in the Old Testament to God's *judging* His people; this being always a cause of joy as their sure deliverance from their enemies. So also it is used of those men who, when Israel had no king, rose from time to time as the

champions of the people, to lead them against the foe and who are therefore familiarly called "The Judges. From the tribe of Dan the most conspicuous of these arose, Samson, namely, and it is probably mainly with reference to this fact that Jacob so emphatically predicts of *this* tribe, "Dan shall judge his people." And notice the appended clause (as reflecting shame on the sluggish Issachar), "as one of the tribes of Israel," recognising always that his strength was not for himself alone, but for his country; that he was not an isolated people who had to concern himself only with his own affairs, but *one* of the tribes of Israel. The manner, too, in which Dan was to do this was singularly descriptive of the facts subsequently evolved. Dan was a very small and insignificant tribe, whose lot originally lay close to the Philistines on the southern border of the land. It might seem to be no obstacle whatever to the invading Philistines as they passed to the richer portion of Judah, but this little tribe, through Samson, smote these terrors of the Israelites with so sore and alarming a destruction as to cripple them for years and make them harmless We see, therefore, how aptly Jacob compares them to the venomous snake that lurks in the road and bites the horses' heels; the dust-coloured adder that a man treads on before he is aware, and whose poisonous stroke is more deadly than the foe he is looking for in front. And especially significant did the imagery appear to the Jews, with whom this poisonous adder was indigenous, but to whom the horse was the symbol of foreign armament and invasion. The whole tribe of Dan, too, seems to have partaken of that "grim humour" with which Samson saw his foes walk time after time into the traps he set for them, and give

themselves an easy prey to him—a humour which comes out with singular piquancy in the narrative given in the Book of Judges of one of the forays of this tribe, in which they carried off Micah's priest and even his gods.

But why, in the full flow of his eloquent description of the varied virtues of his sons, does the patriarch suddenly check himself, lie back on his pillows, and quietly say, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O God"? Does he feel his strength leave him so that he cannot go on to bless the rest of his sons, and has but time to yield his own spirit to God? Are we here to interpolate one of those scenes we are all fated to witness when some eagerly watched breath seems altogether to fail before the last words have been uttered, when those who have been standing apart, through sorrow and reverence, quickly gather round the bed to catch the last look, and when the dying man again collects himself and finishes his work? Probably Jacob, having, as it were, projected himself forward into those stirring and warlike times he has been speaking of, so realises the danger of his people, and the futility even of such help as Dan's when God does not help, that, as if from the midst of doubtful war, he cries, as with a battle cry, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O God." His longing for victory and blessing to his sons far overshot the deliverance from Philistines accomplished by Samson. That deliverance he thankfully accepts and joyfully predicts, but in the spirit of an Israelite indeed, and a genuine child of the promise, he remains unsatisfied, and sees in all such deliverance only the pledge of God's coming nearer and nearer to His people, bringing with Him *His* eternal salvation. In Dan, therefore, we have not the

catholic spirit of Zebulun, nor the practical, though sluggish, temper of Issachar; but we are guided rather to the disposition which ought to be maintained through all Christian life, and which, with special care, needs to be cherished in Church-life—a disposition to accept with gratitude all success and triumph, but still to aim through all at that highest victory which God alone can accomplish for His people. It is to be the battle-cry with which every Christian and every Church is to preserve itself, not merely against external foes, but against the far more disastrous influence of self-confidence, pride, and glorying in man—"For *Thy* salvation, O God, do we wait."

Gad also is a tribe whose history is to be warlike, his very name signifying a marauding, guerilla troop; and his history was to illustrate the victories which God's people gain by tenacious, watchful, ever-renewed warfare. The Church has often prospered by her Dan-like insignificance; the world not troubling itself to make war upon her. But oftener Gad is a better representative of the mode in which her successes are gained. We find that the men of Gad were among the most valuable of David's warriors, when his necessity evoked all the various skill and energy of Israel. "Of the Gadites," we read, "there separated themselves unto David into the hold of the wilderness men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains: one of the least of them was better than an hundred, and the greatest mightier than a thousand." And there is something particularly inspiriting to the individual Christian in finding this pronounced as part of the blessing of God's people—"a troop shall over-

come him, *but he shall* overcome at the last." It is this that enables us to persevere—that we have God's assurance that present discomfiture does not doom us to final defeat. If you be among the children of promise, among those that gather round God to catch His blessing, you shall overcome at the last. You may now feel as if assaulted by treacherous, murderous foes, irregular troops, that betake themselves to every cruel deceit, and are ruthless in spoiling you; you may be assailed by so many and strange temptations that you are bewildered and cannot lift a hand to resist, scarce seeing where your danger comes from; you may be buffeted by messengers of Satan, distracted by a sudden and tumultuous incursion of a crowd of cares so that you are moved away from the old habits of your life amid which you seem to stand safely; your heart may seem to be the rendezvous of all ungodly and wicked thoughts, you may feel trodden under foot and overrun by sin, but, with the blessing of God, you shall overcome at the last. Only cultivate that dogged pertinacity of Gad, which has no thought of ultimate defeat, but rallies cheerfully and resolutely after every discomfiture.

THE

BOOK OF EXODUS

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PREFACE.

MUCH is now denied or doubted, within the Church itself, concerning the Book of Exodus, which was formerly accepted with confidence by all Christians.

But one thing can neither be doubted nor denied. Jesus Christ did certainly treat this book, taking it as He found it, as possessed of spiritual authority, a sacred scripture. He taught His disciples to regard it thus, and they did so.

Therefore, however widely His followers may differ about its date and origin, they must admit the right of a Christian teacher to treat this book, taking it as he finds it, as a sacred scripture and invested with spiritual authority. It is the legitimate subject of exposition in the Church.

Such work this volume strives, however imperfectly, to perform. Its object is to edify in the first place, and also, but in the second place, to inform. Nor has the author consciously shrunk from saying what seemed to him proper to be said because the utterance would be unwelcome, either to the latest critical theory, or to the last sensational gospel of an hour.

But since controversy has not been sought,

although exposition has not been suppressed when it carried weapons, by far the greater part of the volume appeals to all who accept their Bible as, in any true sense, a gift from God.

No task is more difficult than to exhibit the Old Testament in the light of the New, discovering the permanent in the evanescent, and the spiritual in the form and type which it inhabited and illuminated. This book is at least the result of a firm belief that such a connection between the two Testaments does exist, and of a patient endeavour to receive the edification offered by each Scripture, rather than to force into it, and then extort from it, what the expositor desires to find. Nor has it been supposed that by allowing the imagination to assume, in sacred things, that rank as a guide which reason holds in all other practical affairs, any honour would be done to Him Who is called the Spirit of knowledge and wisdom, but not of fancy and quaint conceits.

If such an attempt does, in any degree, prove successful and bear fruit, this fact will be of the nature of a scientific demonstration.

If this ancient Book of Exodus yields solid results to a sober devotional exposition in the nineteenth Christian century, if it is not an idle fancy that its teaching harmonises with the principles and theology of the New Testament, and even demands the New Testament as the true commentary upon the Old, what follows? How comes it that the oak is potentially in the acorn, and the living creature in the egg? No germ is a manufactured article: it is a part of the system of the universe.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PROLOGUE.

Exodus i. 1-6.

"And these are the names of the children of Israel which came into Egypt."

MANY books of the Old Testament begin with the conjunction And. This fact, it has been often pointed out, is a silent indication of truth, that each author was not recording certain isolated incidents, but parts of one great drama, events which oined hands with the past and future, looking before and after.

Thus the Book of the Kings took up the tale from Samuel, Samuel from Judges, and Judges from Joshua, and all carried the sacred movement forward towards a goal as yet unreached. Indeed, it was impossible, remembering the first promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent, and the later assurance that in the seed of Abraham should be the universal blessing, for a faithful Jew to forget that all the history of his race was the evolution of some grand hope, a pilgrimage towards some goal unseen. Bearing in mind that there is now revealed to us a world-wide tendency toward the supreme consummation, the bringing all things under the headship of Christ, it is not to be denied that this hope of the

ancient Jew is given to all mankind. Each new stage in universal history may be said to open with this same conjunction. It links the history of England with that of Julius Cæsar and of the Red Indian; nor is the chain composed of accidents: it is forged by the hand of the God of providence. Thus, in the conjunction which binds these Old Testament narratives together, is found the germ of that instinctive and elevating phrase, the Philosophy of History. But there is nowhere in Scripture the notion which too often degrades and stiffens that Philosophy—the notion that history is urged forward by blind forces, amid which the individual man is too puny to assert himself. Without a Moses the Exodus is inconceivable, and God always achieves His purpose through the providential man.

The Books of the Pentateuch are held together in a yet stronger unity than the rest, being sections of one and the same narrative, and having been accredited with a common authorship from the earliest mention of them. Accordingly, the Book of Exodus not only begins with this conjunction (which assumes the previous narrative), but also rehearses the descent into Egypt. "And these are the names of the sons of Israel which came into Egypt,"—names blotted with many a crime, rarely suggesting any lovable or great association, yet the names of men with a marvellous heritage, as being "the sons of Israel," the Prince who prevailed with God. Moreover they are consecrated: their father's dying words had conveyed to every one of them some expectation, some mysterious import which the future should disclose. In the issue would be revealed the awful influence of the past upon

the future, of the fathers upon the children even beyond the third and fourth generation—an influence which is nearer to destiny, in its stern, subtle and far-reaching strength, than any other recognised by religion. Destiny, however, it is not, or how should the name of Dan have faded out from the final list of "every tribe of the children of Israel" in the Apocalypse (Rev. vii. 5-8), where Manasseh is reckoned separately from Joseph to complete the twelve?

We read that with the twelve came their posterity, seventy souls in direct descent from Jacob; but in this number he is himself included, according to that well-known Orientalism which Milton strove to force upon our language in the phrase—

"The fairest of her daughters Eve."

Joseph is also reckoned, although he "was in Egypt already." Now, it must be observed that of these seventy, sixty-eight were males, and therefore the people of the Exodus must not be reckoned to have sprung in the interval from seventy, but (remembering polygamy) from more than twice that number, even if we refuse to make any account of the household which is mentioned as coming with every man. These households were probably smaller in each case than that of Abraham, and the famine in its early stages may have reduced the number of retainers; yet they account for much of what is pronounced incredible in the rapid expansion of the clan into a nation.* But when all

* Professor Curtiss quotes a volume of family memoirs which shows that 5,564 persons are known to be descended from Lieutenant John Hollister, who emigrated to America in the year 1642 (*Expositor*, Nov. 1887, p. 329). This is probably equal in ratio to the increase of Israel in Egypt.

allowance has been made, the increase continues to be, such as the narrator clearly regards it, abnormal, well-nigh preternatural, a fitting type of the expansion, amid fiercer persecutions, of the later Church of God, the true circumcision, who also sprang from the spiritual parentage of another Seventy and another Twelve.

"And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation." Thus the connection with Canaan became a mere tradition, and the powerful courtier who had nursed their interests disappeared. When they remembered him, in the bitter time which lay before them, it was only to reflect that all mortal help must perish. It is thus in the spiritual world also. Paul reminds the Philippians that they can obey in his absence and not in his presence only, working out their own salvation, as no apostle can work it out on their behalf. And the reason is that the one real support is ever present. Work out your own salvation, for it is God (not any teacher) Who worketh in you. The Hebrew race was to learn its need of Him, and in Him to recover its freedom. Moreover, the influences which mould all men's characters, their surroundings and mental atmosphere, were completely changed. These wanderers for pasture were now in the presence of a compact and impressive social system, vast cities, gorgeous temples, an imposing ritual. They were infected as well as educated there, and we find the men of the Exodus not only murmuring for Egyptian comforts, but demanding visible gods to go before them.

Yet, with all its drawbacks, the change was a necessary part of their development. They should return from Egypt relying upon no courtly patron, no mortal might or wisdom, aware of a name of God more pro-

found than was spoken in the covenant of their fathers, with their narrow family interests and rivalries and their family traditions expanded into national hopes, national aspirations, a national religion.

Perhaps there is another reason why Scripture has reminded us of the vigorous and healthy stock whence came the race that multiplied exceedingly. For no book attaches more weight to the truth, so miserably perverted that it is discredited by multitudes, but amply vindicated by modern science, that good breeding, in the strictest sense of the word, is a powerful factor in the lives of men and nations. To be well born does not of necessity require aristocratic parentage, nor does such parentage involve it: but it implies a virtuous, temperate and pious stock. In extreme cases the doctrine of race is palpable; for who can doubt that the sins of dissolute parents are visited upon their puny and short-lived children, and that the posterity of the just inherit not only honour and a welcome in the world, "an open door," but also immunity from many a physical blemish and many a perilous craving? If the Hebrew race, after eighteen centuries of calamity, retains an unrivalled vigour and tenacity, be it remembered how its iron sinew has been twisted, from what a sire it sprang, through what ages of more than "natural selection" the dross was throughly purged out, and (as Isaiah loves to reiterate) a chosen remnant left. Already, in Egypt, in the vigorous multiplication of the race, was visible the germ of that amazing vitality which makes it, even in its overthrow, so powerful an element in the best modern thought and action.

It is a well-known saying of Goethe that the quality for which God chose Israel was probably toughness.

Perhaps the saying would better be inverted: it was among the most remarkable endowments, unto which Israel was called, and called by virtue of qualities in which Goethe himself was remarkably deficient.

Now, this principle is in full operation still, and ought to be solemnly pondered by the young. Self-indulgence, the sowing of wild oats, the seeing of life while one is young, the taking one's fling before one settles down, the having one's day (like "every dog," for it is to be observed that no person says, "every Christian"), these things seem natural enough. And their unsuspected issues in the next generation, dire and subtle and far-reaching, these also are more natural still, being the operation of the laws of God.

On the other hand, there is no youth living in obedience alike to the higher and humbler laws of our complex nature, in purity and gentleness and healthful occupation, who may not contribute to the stock of happiness in other lives beyond his own, to the future well-being of his native land, and to the day when the sadly polluted stream of human existence shall again flow clear and glad, a pure river of water of life.

GOD IN HISTORY.

i. 7.

With the seventh verse, the new narrative, the course of events treated in the main body of this book, begins.

And we are at once conscious of this vital difference between Exodus and Genesis,—that we have passed from the story of men and families to the history of a nation. In the first book the Canaanites and Egyptians concern us only as they affect Abraham or Joseph. In

the second book, even Moses himself concerns us only for the sake of Israel. He is in some respects a more imposing and august character than any who preceded him; but what we are told is no longer the story of a soul, nor are we pointed so much to the development of his spiritual life as to the work he did, the tyrant overthrown, the nation moulded, the law and the ritual imposed on it.

For Jacob it was a discovery that God was in Bethel as well as in his father's house. But now the Hebrew nation was to learn that He could plague the gods of Egypt in their stronghold, that His way was in the sea, that Horeb in Arabia was the Mount of God, that He could lead them like a horse through the wilderness.

When Jacob in Peniel wrestles with God and prevails, he wins for himself a new name, expressive of the higher moral elevation which he has attained. But when Moses meets God in the bush, it is to receive a commission for the public benefit; and there is no new name for Moses, but a fresh revelation of God for the nation to learn. And in all their later history we feel that the national life which it unfolds was nourished and sustained by these glorious early experiences, the most unique as well as the most inspiriting on record.

Here, then, a question of great moment is suggested. Beyond the fact that Abraham was the father of the Jewish race, can we discover any closer connection between the lives of the patriarchs and the history of Israel? Is there a truly spiritual coherence between them, or merely a genealogical sequence? For if the Bible can make good its claim to be vitalised throughout by the eternal Spirit of God, and leading forward steadily to His final revelation in Christ, then its parts will be symmetrical, proportionate and well designed.

If it be a universal book, there must be a better reason for the space devoted to preliminary and half secular stories, which is a greater bulk than the whole of the New Testament, than that these histories chance to belong to the nation whence Christ came. If no such reason can be found, the failure may not perhaps outweigh the great evidences of the faith, but it will score for something on the side of infidelity. But if upon examination it becomes plain that all has its part in one great movement, and that none can be omitted without marring the design, and if moreover this design has become visible only since the fulness of the time is come, the discovery will go far to establish the claim of Scripture to reveal throughout a purpose truly divine, dealing with man for ages, and consummated in the gift of Christ.

Now, it is to St. Paul that we turn for light upon the connection between the Old Testament and the New. And he distinctly lays down two great principles. The first is that the Old Testament is meant to educate men for the New; and especially that the sense of failure, impressed upon men's consciences by the stern demands of the Law, was necessary to make them accept the Gospel.

The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ: it entered that sin might abound. And it is worth notice that this effect was actually wrought, not only upon the gross transgressor by the menace of its broken precepts, but even more perhaps upon the high-minded and pure, by the creation in their breasts of an ideal, inaccessible in its loftiness. He who says, All these things have I kept from my youth up, is the same who feels the torturing misgiving, What good thing must I do to attain life? . . . What lack I yet?

He who was blameless as touching the righteousness of the law, feels that such superficial innocence is worthless, that the law is spiritual and he is carnal, sold under sin.

Now, this principle need by no means be restricted to the Mosaic institutions. If this were the object of the law, it would probably explain much more. And when we return to the Old Testament with this clue, we find every condition in life examined, every social and political experiment exhausted, a series of demonstrations made with scientific precision, to refute the arch-heresy which underlies all others—that in favourable circumstances man might save himself, that for the evil of our lives our evil surroundings are more to be blamed than we.

Innocence in prosperous circumstances, unwarped by evil habit, untainted by corruption in the blood, uncompelled by harsh surroundings, simple innocence had its day in Paradise, a brief day with a shameful close. God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions, until the flood swept away the descendants of him who was made after the image of God.

Next we have a chosen family, called out from all the perilous associations of its home beyond the river, to begin a new career in a new land, in special covenant with the Most High, and with every endowment for the present and every hope for the future which could help to retain its loyalty. Yet the third generation reveals the thirst of Esau for his brother's blood, the treachery of Jacob, and the distraction and guilt of his fierce and sensual family. It is when individual and family life have thus proved ineffectual amid the happiest circumstances, that the tribe and the nation essay the task. Led up from the furnace of affliction,

hardened and tempered in the stern free life of the desert, impressed by every variety of fortune, by slavery and escape, by the pursuit of an irresistible foe and by a rescue visibly divine, awed finally by the sublime revelations of Sinai, the nation is ready for the covenant (which is also a challenge)—The man that doeth these things shall live by them: if thou diligently hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God . . . He shall set thee on high above all nations.

Such is the connection between this narrative and what went before. And the continuation of the same experiment, and the same failure, can be traced through all the subsequent history. Whether in so loose an organisation that every man does what is right in his own eyes, or under the sceptre of a hero or a sage,—whether so hard pressed that self-preservation ought to have driven them to their God, or so marvellously delivered that gratitude should have brought them to their knees,—whether engulfed a second time in a more hopeless captivity, or restored and ruled by a hierarchy whose authority is entirely spiritual,—in every variety of circumstances the same melancholy process repeats itself; and lawlessness, luxury, idolatry and self-righteousness combine to stop every mouth, to make every man guilty before God, to prove that a greater salvation is still needed, and thus to pave the way for the Messiah.

The second great principle of St. Paul is that faith in a divine help, in pardon, blessing and support, was the true spirit of the Old Testament as well as of the New. The challenge of the law was meant to produce self-despair, only that men might trust in God. Appeal was made especially to the cases of Abraham and David, the founder of the race and of the dynasty, clearly

because the justification without works of the patriarch and of the king were precedents to decide the general question (Rom. iv. 1-8). Now, this is pre-eminently the distinction between Jewish history and all others, that in it God is everything and man is nothing. Every sceptical treatment of the story makes Moses to be the deliverer from Egypt, and shows us the Jewish nation gradually finding out God. But the nation itself believed nothing of the kind. It confessed itself to have been from the beginning vagrant and rebellious and unthankful: God had always found out Israel, never Israel God. The history is an expansion of the parable of the good shepherd. And this perfect harmony of a long record with itself and with abstract principles is both instructive and reassuring.

As the history of Israel opens before us, a third principle claims attention—one which the apostle quietly assumes, but which is forced on our consideration by the unhappy state of religious thought in these degenerate days.

"They are not to be heard," says the Seventh Article rightly, "which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises." But certainly they also would be unworthy of a hearing who would feign that the early Scriptures do not give a vast, a preponderating weight, to the concerns of our life on earth. Only very slowly, and as the result of long training, does the future begin to reveal its supremacy over the present. It would startle many a devout reader out of his propriety to discover the small proportion of Old Testament scriptures in which eternity and its prospects are discussed, to reckon the passages, habitually applied to spiritual thraldom and emancipation, which were spoken at first of earthly tyranny and earthly deliverance,

and to observe, even in the pious aspirations of the Psalms, how much of the gratitude and joy of the righteous comes from the sense that he is made wiser than the ancient, and need not fear though a host rose up against him, and can break a bow of steel, and has a table prepared for him, and an overflowing cup. Especially is this true of the historical books. God is here seen ruling states, judging in the earth, remembering Israel in bondage, and setting him free, providing supernatural food and water, guiding him by the fiery cloud. There is not a word about regeneration, conversion, hell, or heaven. And yet there is a profound sense of God. He is real, active, the most potent factor in the daily lives of men. Now, this may teach us a lesson, highly important to us all, and especially to those who must teach others. The difference between spirituality and secularity is not the difference between the future life and the present, but between a life that is aware of God and a godless one. Perhaps, when we find our gospel a matter of indifference and weariness to men who are absorbed in the bitter monotonous and dreary struggle for existence, we ourselves are most to blame. Perhaps, if Moses had approached the Hebrew drudges as we approach men equally weary and oppressed, they would not have bowed their heads and worshipped. And perhaps we should have better success, if we took care to speak of God in this world, making life a noble struggle, charging with new significance the dull and seemingly degraded lot of all who remember Him, such a God as Jesus revealed when He cleansed the leper, and gave sight to the blind, using one and the same word for the "healing" of diseases and the "saving" of souls, and connecting faith equally with both. Exodus will have little to teach us, unless

we believe in that God who knoweth that we have need of food and clothing. And the higher spiritual truths which it expresses will only be found there in dubious and questionable allegory, unless we firmly grasp the great truth, that God is not the Saviour of souls, or of bodies, but of living men in their entirety, and treats their higher and lower wants upon much the same principle, because He is the same God, dealing with the same men, through both.

Moreover, He treats us as the men of other ages. Instead of dealing with Moses upon exceptional and strange lines, He made known His ways unto Moses, His characteristic and habitual ways. And it is on this account that whatsoever things were written aforetime are true admonition for us also, being not violent interruptions but impressive revelations of the steady silent methods of the judgment and the grace of God.

THE OPPRESSION.

i. 7-22.

At the beginning of the history of Israel we find a prosperous race. It was indeed their growing importance, and chiefly their vast numerical increase, which excited the jealousy of their rulers, at the very time when a change of dynasty removed the sense of obligation. It is a sound lesson in political as well as personal godliness that prosperity itself is dangerous, and needs special protection from on high.

Is it merely by chance again that we find in this first of histories examples of the folly of relying upon political connections? As the chief butler remembered not Joseph, nor did he succeed in escaping from prison by securing influence at court, so is the influence of

Joseph himself now become vain, although he was the father of Pharaoh and lord of all his house. His romantic history, his fidelity in temptation, and the services by which he had at once cemented the royal power and saved the people, could not keep his memory alive. The hollow wraith of dying fame died wholly. There arose a new king over Egypt who knew not Joseph.

Such is the value of the highest and purest earthly fame, and such the gratitude of the world to its benefactors. The nation which Joseph rescued from starvation is passive in Pharaoh's hands, and persecutes Israel at his bidding.

And when the actual deliverer arose, his rank and influence were only entanglements through which he had to break.

Meanwhile, except among a few women, obedient to the woman's heart, we find no trace of independent action, no revolt of conscience against the absolute behest of the sovereign, until selfishness replaces virtue, and despair wrings the cry from his servants, Knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?

Now, in Genesis we saw the fate of families, blessed in their father Abraham, or cursed for the offence of Ham. For a family is a real entity, and its members, like those of one body, rejoice and suffer together. But the same is true of nations, and here we have reached the national stage in the education of the world. Here is exhibited to us, therefore, a nation suffering with its monarch to the uttermost, until the cry of the maid-servant behind the mill is as wild and bitter as the cry of Pharaoh upon his throne. It is indeed the eternal curse of despotism that unlimited calamity may be drawn down upon millions by the caprice of one

most unhappy man, himself blinded and h lf maddened by adulation, by the absence of restraint, by unlimited sensual indulgence if his tendencies be low and animal and by the pride of power if he be high-spirited an aspiring.

If we assume, what seems pretty well established, that the Pharaoh from whom Moses fled was Rameses the Great, his spirit was of the nobler kind, and he exhibits a terrible example of the unfitness even of conquering genius for unbridled and irresponsible power. That lesson has had to be repeated, even down to the days of the Great Napoleon.

Now, if the justice of plaguing a nation for the offence of its head be questioned, let us ask first whether the nation accepts his despotism, honours him, and is content to regard him as its chief and captain. According to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, whoever thinks a tyrant enviable, has already himself tyrannised with him in his heart. Do we ourselves, then, never sympathise with political audacity, bold and unscrupulous "resource," success that is bought at the price of strange compliances, and compromises, and wrongs to other men?

The great national lesson is now to be taught to Israel that the most splendid imperial force will be brought to an account for its treatment of the humblest —that there is a God Who judges in the earth. And they were bidden to apply in their own land this experience of their own, dealing kindly with the stranger in the midst of them, "for thou wast a stranger in the land of Egypt." That lesson we have partly learned, who have broken the chain of our slaves. But how much have we left undone! The subject races were never given into our hands to supplant them, as we have

supplanted the Red Indian and the New Zealander, nor to debauch, as men say we are corrupting the African and the Hindoo, but to raise, instruct and Christianise. And if the subjects of a despotism are accountable for the actions of rulers whom they tolerate, how much more are we? What ought we to infer, from this old-world history, of the profound responsibilities of all free citizens?

We attain a principle which reaches far into the spiritual world, when we reflect that if evil deeds of a ruler can justly draw down vengeance upon his people, the converse also must hold good. Reverse the case before us. Let the kingdom be that of the noblest and purest virtue. Let no subject ever be coerced to enter it, nor to remain one hour longer than while his adoring loyalty consents. And shall not these subjects be the better for the virtues of the Monarch whom they love? Is it mere caprice to say that in choosing such a King they do, in a very real sense, appropriate the goodness they crown? If it be natural that Egypt be scourged for the sins of Pharaoh, is it palpably incredible that Christ is made of God unto His people wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption? The doctrine of imputation can easily be so stated as to become absurd. But the imputation of which St. Paul speaks much can only be denied when we are prepared to assail the principle on which all bodies of men are treated, families and nations as well as the Church of God.

It was the jealous cruelty of Pharaoh which drew down upon his country the very perils he laboured to turn away. There was no ground for his fear of any league with foreigners against him. Prosperous and unambitious, the people would have

remained well content beside the flesh-pots of Egypt, for which they sighed even when emancipated from heavy bondage and eating the bread of heaven. Or else, if they had gone forth in peace, from a land whose hospitality had not failed, to their inheritance in Canaan, they would have become an allied nation upon the side where the heaviest blows were afterwards struck by the Asiatic powers. Cruelty and cunning could not retain them, but it could decimate a population and lose an army in the attempt. And this law prevails in the modern world. England paid twenty millions to set her bondmen free. Because America would not follow her example, she ultimately paid the more terrible ransom of civil war. For the same God was in Jamaica and in Florida as in the field of Zoan. Nor was there ever yet a crooked policy which did not recoil either upon its author, or upon his successors when he had passed away. In this case it fulfilled the plans and the prophecies of God, and the wrath of man was made to praise Him.

There is independent reason for believing that at this period one-third at least of the population of Egypt was of alien blood (Brugsch, *History*, ii. 100). A politician might fairly be alarmed, especially if this were the time when the Hittites were threatening the eastern frontier, and had reduced Egypt to stand on the defensive, and erect barrier fortresses. And the circumstances of the country made it very easy to enslave the Hebrews. If any stain of Oriental indifference to the rights of the masses had mingled with the God-given insight of Joseph, when he made his benefactor the owner of all the soil, the Egyptian people were fully avenged upon him now. For this arrangement laid his pastoral race helpless at their

oppressor's feet. Forced labour quickly degenerates into slavery, and men who find the story of their misery hard to credit should consider the state of France before the Revolution, and of the Russian serfs before their emancipation. Their wretchedness was probably as bitter as that of the Hebrews at any period but the last climax of their oppression. And they owed it to the same cause—the absolute ownership of the land by others, too remote from them to be sympathetic, to take due account of their feelings, to remember that they were their fellow-men. This was enough to slay compassion, even without the aggravation of dealing with an alien and suspected race.

Now, it is instructive to observe these reappearances of wholesale crime. They warn us that the utmost achievements of human wickedness are human still; not wild and grotesque importations by a fiend, origi nated in the abyss, foreign to the world we live in. Satan finds the material for his master-strokes in the estrangement of class from class, in the drying up of the fountains of reciprocal human feeling, in the failure of real, fresh, natural affection in our bosom for those who differ widely from us in rank or circumstances. All cruelties are possible when a man does not seem to us really a man, nor his woes really woeful. For when the man has sunk into an animal it is only a step to his vivisection.

Nor does anything tend to deepen such perilous estrangement, more than the very education, culture and refinement, in which men seek a substitute for religion and the sense of brotherhood in Christ. It is quite conceivable that the tyrant who drowned the Hebrew infants was an affectionate father, and pitied his nobles when their children died. But his sym-

pathies could not reach beyond the barriers of a caste. Do *our* sympathies really overleap such barriers? Would God that even His Church believed aright in the reality of a human nature like our own, soiled, sorrowful, shamed, despairing, drugged into that apathetical insensibility which lies even below despair, yet aching still, in ten thousand bosoms, in every great city of Christendom, every day and every night! Would to God that she understood what Jesus meant, when He called one lost creature by the tender name which she had not yet forfeited, saying, "Woman, where are thine accusers?" and when He asked Simon, who scorned such another, "Seest thou this woman" Would God that when she prays for the Holy Spirit of Jesus she would really seek a mind like His, not only in piety and prayerfulness, but also in tender and heart-felt brotherhood with all, even the vilest of the weary and heavy-laden!

Many great works of ancient architecture, the pyramids among the rest, were due to the desire of crushing, by abject toil, the spirit of a subject people. We cannot ascribe to Hebrew labour any of the more splendid piles of Egyptian masonry, but the store cities or arsenals which they built can be identified. They are composed of such crude brick as the narrative describes; and the absence of straw in the later portion of them can still be verified. Rameses was evidently named after their oppressor, and this strengthens the conviction that we are reading of events in the nineteenth dynasty, when the shepherd kings had recently been driven out, leaving the eastern frontier so weak as to demand additional fortresses, and so far depopulated as to give colour to the exaggerated assertion of Pharaoh, "the people are more and mightier than we." It is by

such exaggerations and alarms that all the worst crimes of statesmen have been justified to consenting peoples. And we, when we carry what seems to us a rightful object, by inflaming the prejudice and misleading the judgment of other men, are moving on the same treacherous and slippery inclines. Probably no evil is committed without some amount of justification, which the passions exaggerate, while they ignore the prohibitions of the law.

How came it to pass that the fierce Hebrew blood, which was yet to boil in the veins of the Maccabees, and to give battle, not unworthily, to the Roman conquerors of the world, failed to resent the cruelties of Pharaoh?

Partly, of course, because the Jewish people was only now becoming aware of its national existence; but also because it had forsaken God. Its religion, if not supplanted, was at least adulterated by the influence of the mystic pantheism and the stately ritual which surrounded them.

Joshua bade his victorious followers to "put away the gods whom your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord" (Josh. xxiv. 14). And in Ezekiel the Lord Himself complains, "They rebelled against Me and would not hearken unto Me; they did not cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt" (Ezek. xx. 8).

Now, there is nothing which enfeebles the spirit and breaks the courage like religious dependence. A strong priesthood always means a feeble people, most of all when they are of different blood. And Israel was now dependent on Egypt alike for the highest and lowest needs—grass for the cattle and religion for the soul. And when they had sunk so low, it is evident

that their emancipation had to be wrought for them entirely without their help. From first to last they were passive, not only for want of spirit to help themselves, but because the glory of any exploit of theirs might have illuminated some false deity whom they adored.

Standing still, they saw the salvation of God, and it was not possible to give His glory to another.

For this cause also, judgment had, first of all, to be wrought upon the gods of Egypt.

In the meantime, without spirit enough to resist, they saw complete destruction drawing nearer to them by successive strides. At first Pharaoh "dealt wisely with them," and they found themselves entrapped into a hard bondage almost unawares. But a strange power upheld them, and the more they were afflicted the more they multiplied and spread abroad. In this they ought to have discerned a divine support, and remembered the promise to Abraham that God would multiply his seed as the stars of heaven. It may have helped them presently to "cry unto the Lord." And the Egyptians were not merely "grieved" because of them: they felt as the Israelites afterwards felt towards that monotonous diet of which they used the same word, and said, "our soul loatheth this light bread." Here it expresses that fierce and contemptuous attitude which the Californian and Australian are now assuming toward the swarms of Chinamen whose labour is so indispensable, yet the infusion of whose blood into the population is so hateful. Then the Egyptians make their service rigorous, and their lives bitter.

And at last that happens which is a part of every downward course: the veil is dropped; what men have done by stealth, and as if they would deceive them-

selves, they soon do consciously, avowing to their conscience what at first they could not face. Thus Pharaoh began by striving to check a dangerous population; and ended by committing wholesale murder. Thus men become drunkards through conviviality, thieves through borrowing what they mean to restore, and hypocrites through slightly overstating what they really feel. And, since there are nice gradations in evil, down to the very last, Pharaoh will not yet avow publicly the atrocity which he commands a few humble women to perpetrate; decency is with him, as it is often, the last substitute for a conscience.

Among the agents of God for the shipwreck of all full-grown wrongs, the chief is the revolt of human nature, since, fallen though we know ourselves to be, the image of God is not yet effaced in us. The better instincts of humanity are irrepressible—most so perhaps among the poor. It is by refusing to trust its intuitions that men grow vile; and to the very last that refusal is never absolute, so that no villainy can reckon upon its agents, and its agents cannot always reckon upon themselves. Above all, the heart of every woman is in a plot against the wrong; and as Pharaoh was afterwards defeated by the ingenuity of a mother and the sympathy of his own daughter, so his first scheme was spoiled by the disobedience of the midwives, themselves Hebrews, upon whom he reckoned.

Let us not fear to avow that these women, whom God rewarded, lied to the king when he reproached them, since their answer, even if it were not unfounded, was palpably a misrepresentation of the facts. The reward was not for their falsehood, but for their humanity. They lived when the notion of martyrdom for an avowal so easy to evade was utterly unknown.

Abraham lied to Abimelech. Both Samuel and David equivocated with Saul. We have learned better things from the King of truth, Who was born and came into the world to bear witness to the truth. We know that the martyr's bold protest against unrighteousness is the highest vocation of the Church, and is rewarded in the better country. But they knew nothing of this, and their service was acceptable according as they had, not according as they had not. As well might we blame the patriarchs for having been slave-owners, and David for having invoked mischief upon his enemies, as these women for having fallen short of the Christian ideal of veracity. Let us beware lest we come short of it ourselves. And let us remember that the way of the Church through time is the path of the just, beset with mist and vapour at the dawn, but shining more and more unto the perfect day.

In the meantime, God acknowledges, and Holy Scripture celebrates, the service of these obscure and lowly heroines. Nothing done for Him goes unrewarded. To slaves it was written that "From the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. iii. 24). And what these women saved for others was what was recompensed to themselves, domestic happiness, family life and its joys. God made them houses.

The king is now driven to avow himself in a public command to drown all the male infants of the Hebrews; and the people become his accomplices by obeying him. For this they were yet to experience a terrible retribution, when there was not a house in Egypt that had not one dead.

The features of the king to whom these atrocities are pretty certainly brought home are still to be seen

in the museum at Boulak. Seti I. is the most beautiful of all the Egyptian monarchs whose faces lie bare to the eyes of modern sightseers; and his refined features, intelligent, high-bred and cheerful, resemble wonderfully, yet surpass, those of Rameses II., his successor, from whom Moses fled. This is the builder of the vast and exquisite temple of Amon at Thebes, the grandeur of which is amazing even in its ruins; and his culture and artistic gifts are visible, after all these centuries, upon his face. It is a strange comment upon the modern doctrine that culture is to become a sufficient substitute for religion. And his own record of his exploits is enough to show that the sense of beauty is not that of pity: he is the jackal leaping through the land of his enemies, the grim lion, the powerful bull with sharpened horns, who has annihilated the peoples.

There is no greater mistake than to suppose that artistic refinement can either inspire morality or replace it. Have we quite forgotten Nero, and Lucretia Borgia, and Catherine de Medici?

Many civilisations have thought little of infant life. Ancient Rome would have regarded this atrocity as lightly as modern China, as we may see by the absolute silence of its literature concerning the murder of the innocents—an event strangely parallel with this in its nature and political motives, and in the escape of one mighty Infant.

Is it conceivable that the same indifference should return, if the sanctions of religion lose their power? Every one remembers the callousness of Rousseau. Strange things are being written by pessimistic unbelief about the bringing of more sufferers into the world. And a living writer in France has advocated the legalising of infanticide, and denounced St. Vincent

de Paul because, "thanks to his odious precautions, this man deferred for years the death of creatures without intelligence," etc.*

It is to the faith of Jesus, not only revealing by the light of eternity the value of every soul, but also replenishing the fountains of human tenderness that had well-nigh become exhausted, that we owe our modern love of children. In the very helplessness which the ancient masters of the world exposed to destruction without a pang, we see the type of what we must ourselves become, if we would enter heaven. But we cannot afford to forget either the source or the sanctions of the lesson.

* J. K. Huysmans—quoted in *Nineteenth Century*, May 1888, p. 673.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESCUE OF MOSES.

ii. 1-10.

WE have said that the Old Testament history teems with political wisdom, lessons of permanent instruction for mankind, on the level of this life, yet godly, as all true lessons must be, in a world of which Christ is King. These our religion must learn to recognise and proclaim, if it is ever to win the respect of men of affairs, and "leaven the whole lump" of human life with sacred influence.

Such a lesson is the importance of the individual in the history of nations. History, as read in Scripture, is indeed a long relation of heroic resistance or of base compliance in the presence of influences which are at work to debase modern peoples as well as those of old. The holiness of Samuel, the gallant faith of David, the splendour and wisdom of Solomon, the fervid zeal of Elijah, the self-respecting righteousness of Nehemiah, —ignore these, and the whole course of affairs becomes vague and unintelligible. Most of all this is true of Moses, whose appearance is now related.

In profane history it is the same. Alexander, Mahomet, Luther, William the Silent, Napoleon,—will any one pretend that Europe uninfluenced by these personalities would have become the Europe that we know?

And this truth is not at all a speculative, unpractical theory: it is vital. For now there is a fashion of speaking about the tendency of the age, the time-spirit, as an irresistible force which moulds men like potters' clay, crowning those who discern and help it, but grinding to powder all who resist its course. In reality there are always a hundred time-spirits and tendencies competing for the mastery—some of them violent, selfish, atheistic, or luxurious (as we see with our own eyes to-day)—and the shrewdest judges are continually at fault as to which of them is to be victorious, and recognised hereafter as the spirit of the age.

This modern pretence that men are nothing, and streams of tendency are all, is plainly a gospel of capitulations, of falsehood to one's private convictions, and of servile obedience to the majority and the popular cry. For, if individual men are nothing, what am I? If we are all bubbles floating down a stream, it is folly to strive to breast the current. Much practical baseness and servility is due to this base and servile creed. And the cure for it is belief in another spirit than that of the present age, trust in an inspiring God, who rescued a herd of slaves and their fading convictions from the greatest nation upon earth by matching one man, shrinking and reluctant yet obedient to his mission, against Pharaoh and all the tendencies of the age.

And it is always so. God turns the scale of events by the vast weight of a man, faithful and true, and sufficiently aware of Him to refuse, to universal clamour, the surrender of his liberty or his religion. In small matters, as in great, there is no man, faithful to a lonely duty or conviction, understanding that to have discerned it is a gift and a vocation, but makes the world

better and stronger, and works out part of the answer to that great prayer "Thy will be done."

We have seen already that the religion of the Hebrews in Egypt was corrupted and in danger of being lost. To this process, however, there must have been bright exceptions; and the mother of Moses bore witness, by her very name, to her fathers' God. The first syllable of Jochebed is proof that the name of God, which became the keynote of the new revelation, was not entirely new.

As yet the parents of Moses are not named; nor is there any allusion to the close relationship which would have forbidden their union at a later period (chap. vi. 20). And throughout all the story of his youth and early manhood there is no mention whatever of God or of religion. Elsewhere it is not so. The Epistle to the Hebrews declares that through faith the babe was hidden, and through faith the man refused Egyptian rank. Stephen tells us that he expected his brethren to know that God by his hand was giving them deliverance. But the narrative in Exodus is wholly untheological. If Moses were the author, we can see why he avoided reflections which directly tended to glorify himself. But if the story were a subsequent invention, why is the tone so cold, the light so colourless?

Now, it is well that we are invited to look at all these things from their human side, observing the play of human affection, innocent subtlety, and pity. God commonly works through the heart and brain which He has given us, and we do not glorify Him at all by ignoring these. If in this case there were visible a desire to suppress the human agents, in favour of the Divine Preserver, we might suppose that a different historian would have given a less wonderful account

of the plagues, the crossing of the Sea, and the revelation from Sinai. But since full weight is allowed to second causes in the early life of Moses, the story is entitled to the greater credit when it tells of the burning bush and the flaming mountain.

Let us, however, put together the various narratives and their lessons. At the outset we read of a marriage celebrated between kinsfolk, when the storm of persecution was rising. And hence we infer that courage or strong affection made the parents worthy of him through whom God should show mercy unto thousands. The first child was a girl, and therefore safe; but we may suppose, although silence in Scripture proves little, that Aaron, three years before the birth of Moses, had not come into equal peril with him. Moses was therefore born just when the last atrocity was devised, when trouble was at its height.

"At this time Moses was born," said Stephen. Edifying inferences have been drawn from the statement in Exodus that "the woman . . . hid him." Perhaps the stronger man quailed, but the maternal instinct was not at fault, and it was rewarded abundantly. From which we only learn, in reality, not to overstrain the words of Scripture; since the Epistle to the Hebrews distinctly says that he "was hid three months by his parents"—both of them, while naturally the mother is the active agent.

All the accounts agree that he was thus hidden, "because they saw that he was a goodly child" (Heb. xi. 23). It is a pathetic phrase. We see them, before the crisis, vaguely submitting in theory to an unrealised atrocity, ignorant how imperiously their nature would forbid the crime, not planning disobedience in advance, nor led to it by any reasoning process. All is changed

when the little one gazes at them with that marvellous appeal in its unconscious eyes, which is known to every parent, and helps him to be a better man. There is a great difference between one's thought about an infant, and one's feeling towards the actual baby. He was their child, their beautiful child; and this it was that turned the scale. For him they would now dare anything, "because they saw he was a goodly child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." Now, impulse is often a great power for evil, as when appetite or fear, suddenly taking visible shape, overwhelms the judgment and plunges men into guilt. But good impulses may be the very voice of God, stirring whatever is noble and generous within us. Nor are they accidental: loving and brave emotions belong to warm and courageous hearts; they come of themselves, like song birds, but they come surely where sunshine and still groves invite them, not into clamour and foul air. Thus arose in their bosoms the sublime thought of God as an active power to be reckoned upon. For as certainly as every bad passion that we harbour preaches atheism, so does all goodness tend to sustain itself by the consciousness of a supreme Goodness in reserve. God had sent them their beautiful child, and who was Pharaoh to forbid the gift? And so religion and natural pity joined hands, their supreme convictions and their yearning for their infant. "By faith Moses was hid . . . because they saw he was a goodly child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."

Such, if we desire a real and actual salvation, is always the faith which saves. Postpone salvation to an indefinite future; make it no more than the escape from vaguely realised penalties for sins which do not

seem very hateful; and you may suppose that faith in theories can obtain this indulgence; an opinion may weigh against a misgiving. But feel that sin is not only likely to entail damnation, but is really and in itself damnable meanwhile, and then there will be no deliverance possible, but from the hand of a divine Friend, strong to sustain and willing to guide the life. We read that Amram lived a hundred and thirty and seven years, and of all that period we only know that he helped to save the deliverer of his race, by practical faith which made him not afraid, and did not paralyse but stimulate his energies.

When the mother could no longer hide the child, she devised the plan which has made her for ever famous. She placed him in a covered ark, or casket,* plaited (after what we know to have been the Egyptian fashion) of the papyrus reed, and rendered watertight with bitumen, and this she laid among the rushes—a lower vegetation, which would not, like the tall papyrus, hide her treasure—in the well-known and secluded place where the daughter of Pharaoh used to bathe. Something in the known character of the princess may have inspired this ingenious device to move her pity; but it is more likely that the woman's heart, in her extremity, prompted a simple appeal to the woman who could help her if she would. For an Egyptian princess was an important personage, with an establishment of her own, and often possessed of much political influence. The most sanguinary agent of a tyrant would be likely to respect the client of such a patron.

* The same word is used for Noah's ark, but not elsewhere; not, for example, of the ark in the Temple, the name of which occurs elsewhere in Scripture only of the "coffin" of Joseph, and the "chest" for the Temple revenues (Gen. l. 26; 2 Chron. xxiv. 8, 10, 11).

The heart of every woman was in a plot against the cruelty of Pharaoh. Once already the midwives had defeated him; and now, when his own daughter* unexpectedly found, in the water at her very feet, a beautiful child sobbing silently (for she knew not what was there until the ark was opened), her indignation is audible enough in the words, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." She means to say "This is only one specimen of the outrages that are going on."

This was the chance for his sister, who had been set in ambush, not prepared with the exquisite device which follows, but simply "to know what would be done to him." Clearly the mother had reckoned upon his being found, and neglected nothing, although unable herself to endure the agony of watching, or less easily hidden in that guarded spot. And her prudence had a rich reward. Hitherto Miriam's duty had been to remain passive—that hard task so often imposed upon the affection, especially of women, by sickbeds, and also in many a more stirring hazard, and many a spiritual crisis, where none can fight his brother's battle. It is a trying time, when love can only hold its breath, and pray. But let not love suppose that to watch is to do nothing. Often there comes a moment when its word, made wise by the teaching of the heart, is the all-important consideration in deciding mighty issues.

This girl sees the princess at once pitiful and embarrassed, for how can she dispose of her strange charge? Let the moment pass, and the movement of her heart subside, and all may be lost; but Miriam is prompt and bold, and asks "Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?" It is a daring stroke, for the

* Or his sister, the daughter of a former Pharoah.

princess must have understood the position thoroughly, the moment the eager Hebrew girl stepped forward. The disguise was very thin. And at least the heart which pitied the infant must have known the mother when she saw her face, pale with longing. It is therefore only as a form, exacted by circumstances, but well enough though tacitly understood upon both sides, that she bids her nurse the child for her, and promises wages. What reward could equal that of clasping her child to her own agitated bosom in safety, while the destroyers were around?

This incident teaches us that good is never to be despaired of, since this kindly woman grew up in the family of the persecutor.

And the promptitude and success of Miriam suggest a reflection. Men do pity, when it is brought home to them, the privation, suffering, and wrong, which lie around. Magnificent sums are contributed yearly for their relief by the generous instincts of the world. The misfortune is that sentiment is evoked only by visible and pathetic griefs, and that it will not labour as readily as it will subscribe. It is a harder task to investigate, to devise appeals, to invent and work the machinery by which misery may be relieved. Mere compassion will accomplish little, unless painstaking affection supplement it. Who supplies that? Who enables common humanity to relieve itself by simply paying "wages," and confiding the wretched to a painstaking, laborious, loving guardian? The streets would never have known Hospital Saturday, but for Hospital Sunday in the churches. The orphanage is wholly a Christian institution. And so is the lady nurse. The old-fashioned phrase has almost sunk into a party cry, but in a large and noble sense it will continue to be

true to nature as long as bereavement, pain or penitence requires a tender bosom and soothing touch, which speaks of Mother Church.

Thus did God fulfil His mysterious plans. And according to a sad but noble law, which operates widely, what was best in Egypt worked with Him for the punishment of its own evil race. The daughter of Pharaoh adopted the perilous foundling, and educated him in the wisdom of Egypt.

THE CHOICE OF MOSES.

ii. 11-15.

God works even His miracles by means. As He fed the multitude with barley-loaves, so He would emancipate Israel by human agency. It was therefore necessary to educate one of the trampled race "in all the learning of Egypt," and Moses was planted in the court of Pharaoh, like the German Arminius in Rome. Wonderful legends may be read in Josephus of his heroism, his wisdom, and his victories; and these have some foundation in reality, for Stephen tells us that he was mighty in his words and works. Might in words need not mean the fluent utterance which he so earnestly disclaimed (iv. 10), even if forty years' disuse of the language were not enough to explain his later diffidence. It may have meant such power of composition as appears in the hymn by the Red Sea, and in the magnificent valediction to his people.

The point is that among a nation originally pastoral, and now sinking fast into the degraded animalism of slaves, which afterwards betrayed itself in their complaining greed, their sighs for the generous Egyptian dietary, and their impure carouse under the mountain, one man should possess the culture and mental grasp

needed by a leader and lawgiver. "Could not the grace of God have supplied the place of endowment and attainment?" Yes, truly; and it was quite as likely to do this for one who came down from His immediate presence with his face intolerably bright, as for the last impudent enthusiast who declaims against the need of education in sentences which at least prove that for him the want has by no substitute been completely met. But the grace of God chose to give the qualification, rather than replace it, alike to Moses and St. Paul. Nor is there any conspicuous example among the saints of a man being thrust into a rank for which he was not previously made fit.

The painful contrast between his own refined tastes and habits, and the coarser manners of his nation, was no doubt one difficulty of the choice of Moses, and a lifelong trial to him afterwards. He is an example not only to those whom wealth and power would entangle, but to any who are too fastidious and sensitive for the humble company of the people of God.

While the intellect of Moses was developing, it is plain that his connection with his family was not entirely broken. Such a tie as often binds a foster-child to its nurse may have been permitted to associate him with his real parents. Some means were evidently found to instruct him in the history and messianic hopes of Israel, for he knew that their reproach was that of "the Christ," greater riches than all the treasure of Egypt, and fraught with a reward for which he looked in faith (Heb. xi. 26). But what is meant by naming as part of his burden their "reproach," as distinguished from their sufferings?

We shall understand, if we reflect, that his open rupture with Egypt was unlikely to be the work of a

moment. Like all the best workers, he was led forward gradually, at first unconscious of his vocation. Many a protest he must have made against the cruel and unjust policy that steeped the land in innocent blood. Many a jealous councillor must have known how to weaken his dangerous influence by some cautious taunt, some insinuated "reproach" of his own Hebrew origin. The warnings put by Josephus into the lips of the priests in his childhood, were likely enough to have been spoken by some one before he was forty years old. At last, when driven to make his choice, he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," a phrase, especially in its reference to the rejected title as distinguished from "the pleasures of sin," which seems to imply a more formal rupture than Exodus records.

We saw that the piety of his parents was not unhelped by their emotions: they hid him by faith when they saw that he was a goodly child. Such was also the faith by which Moses broke with rank and fortune. He went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. Twice the word of kinship is repeated; and Stephen tells us that Moses himself used it in rebuking the dissensions of his fellow-countrymen. Filled with yearning and pity for his trampled brethren, and with the shame of generous natures who are at ease while others suffer, he saw an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew. With that blended caution and vehemence which belong to his nation still, he looked and saw that there was no man, and slew the Egyptian. Like most acts of passion, this was at once an impulse of the moment, and an outcome of long gathering forces—just as the lightning flash, sudden though it seem, has been prepared by the accumulated electricity of weeks.

And this is the reason why God allows the issues of a lifetime, perhaps of an eternity, to be decided by a sudden word, a hasty blow. Men plead that if time had been given, they would have stifled the impulse which ruined them. But what gave the impulse such violent and dreadful force that it overwhelmed them before they could reflect? The explosion in the coal-mine is not caused by the sudden spark, without the accumulation of dangerous gases, and the absence of such wholesome ventilation as would carry them away. It is so in the breast where evil desires or tempers are harboured, unsubdued by grace, until any accident puts them beyond control. Thank God that such sudden movements do not belong to evil only! A high soul is surprised into heroism, as often perhaps as a mean one into theft or falsehood. In the case of Moses there was nothing unworthy, but much that was unwarranted and presumptuous. The decision it involved was on the right side, but the act was self-willed and unwarranted, and it carried heavy penalties. "The trespass originated not in inveterate cruelty," says St. Augustine, "but in a hasty zeal which admitted of correction . . . resentment against injury was accompanied by love for a brother. . . . Here was evil to be rooted out, but the heart with such capabilities, like good soil, needed only cultivation to make it fruitful in virtue."

Stephen tells us, what is very natural, that Moses expected the people to accept him as their heaven-born deliverer. From which it appears that he cherished high expectations for himself, from Israel if not from Egypt. When he interfered next day between two Hebrews, his question as given in Exodus is somewhat magisterial: "Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?" In

Stephen's version it dictates less, but it lectures a good deal: "Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another?" And it was natural enough that they should dispute his pretensions, for God had not yet given him the rank he claimed. He still needed a discipline almost as sharp as that of Joseph, who, by talking too boastfully of his dreams, postponed their fulfilment until he was chastened by slavery and a dungeon. Even Saul of Tarsus, when converted, needed three years of close seclusion for the transformation of his fiery ardour into divine zeal, as iron to be tempered must be chilled as well as heated. The precipitate and violent zeal of Moses entailed upon him forty years of exile.

And yet his was a noble patriotism. There is a false love of country, born of pride, which blinds one to her faults; and there is a loftier passion which will brave estrangement and denunciation to correct them. Such was the patriotism of Moses, and of all whom God has ever truly called to lead their fellows. Nevertheless he had to suffer for his error.

His first act had been a kind of manifesto, a claim to lead, which he supposed that they would have understood; and yet, when he found his deed was known, he feared and fled. His false step told against him. One cannot but infer also that he was conscious of having already forfeited court favour—that he had before this not only made his choice, but announced it, and knew that the blow was ready to fall on him at any provocation. We read that he dwelt in the land of Midian, a name which was applied to various tracts according to the nomadic wanderings of the tribe, but which plainly included, at this time, some part of the peninsula formed by the tongues of the Red Sea. For, as he fed his flocks, he came to the Mount of God.

MOSES IN MIDIAN.

ii. 16–22.

The interference of Moses on behalf of the daughters of the priest of Midian is a pleasant trait, courteous, and expressive of a refined nature. With this remark, and reflecting that, like many courtesies, it brought its reward, we are often content to pass it by. And yet it deserves a closer examination.

1. For it expresses great energy of character. He might well have been in a state of collapse. He had smitten the Egyptian for Israel's sake: he had appealed to his own people to make common cause, like brethren, against the common foe; and he had offered himself to them as their destined leader in the struggle. But they had refused him the command, and he was rudely awakened to the consciousness that his life was in danger through the garrulous ingratitude of the man he rescued. Now he was a ruined man and an exile, marked for destruction by the greatest of earthly monarchs, with the habits and tastes of a great noble, but homeless among wild races.

It was no common nature which was alert and energetic at such a time. The greatest men have known a period of prostration in calamity: it was enough for honour that they should rally and re-collect their forces. Thinking of Frederick, after Kunersdorf, resigning the command ("I have no resources more, and will not survive the destruction of my country"), and of his subsequent despatch, "I am now recovered from my illness"; and of Napoleon, trembling and weeping on the road to Elba, one turns with fresh admiration to the fallen prince, the baffled liberator, sitting exhausted by the well, but as keen on behalf

of liberty as when Pharaoh trampled Israel, though now the oppressors are a group of rude herdsmen, and the oppressed are Midianite women, driven from the troughs which they have toiled to fill. One remembers Another, sitting also exhausted by the well, defying social usage on behalf of a despised woman, and thereby inspired and invigorated as with meat to eat which His followers knew not of.

2. Moreover there is disinterested bravery in the act, since he hazards the opposition of the men of the land, among whom he seeks refuge, on behalf of a group from which he can have expected nothing. And here it is worth while to notice the characteristic variations in three stories which have certain points of contact. The servant of Abraham, servant-like, was well content that Rebekah should draw for all his camels, while he stood still. The prudent Jacob, anxious to introduce himself to his cousin, rolled away the stone and watered her camels. Moses sat by the well, but did not interfere while the troughs were being filled: it was only the overt wrong which kindled him. But as in great things, so it is in small: our actions never stand alone; having once befriended them, he will do it thoroughly, "and moreover he drew water for us, and watered the flock." Such details could hardly have been thought out by a fabricator; a legend would not have allowed Moses to be slower in courtesy than Jacob;* but the story fits the case exactly: his eyes were with his heart, and that was far away, until the injustice of the shepherds roused him.

* Nor would it have made the women call their deliverer "an Egyptian," for the Hebrew cast of features is very dissimilar. But Moses wore Egyptian dress, and the Egyptians worked mines in the peninsula, so that he was naturally taken for one of them.

And why was Moses thus energetic, fearless, and chivalrous? Because he was sustained by the presence of the Unseen: he endured as seeing Him who is invisible; and having, despite of panic, by faith forsaken Egypt, he was free from the absorbing anxieties which prevent men from caring for their fellows, free also from the cynical misgivings which suspect that violence is more than justice, that to be righteous overmuch is to destroy oneself, and that perhaps, after all, one may see a good deal of wrong without being called upon to interfere. It would be a different world to-day, if all who claim to be "the salt of the earth" were as eager to repress injustice in its smaller and meaner forms as to make money or influential friends. If all petty and cowardly oppression were sternly trodden down, we should soon have a state of public opinion in which gross and large tyranny would be almost impossible. And it is very doubtful whether the flagrant wrongs, which must be comparatively rare, cause as much real mental suffering as the frequent small ones. Does mankind suffer more from wild beasts than from insects? But how few that aspire to emancipate oppressed nations would be content, in the hour of their overthrow, to assert the rights of a handful of women against a trifling fraud, to which indeed they were so well accustomed that its omission surprised their father!

Is it only because we are reading a history, and not a biography, that we find no touch of tenderness, like the love of Jacob for Rachel, in the domestic relations of Moses?

Joseph also married in a strange land, yet he called the name of his first son Manasseh, because God had made him to forget his sorrows: but Moses remembered

his. Neither wife nor child could charm away his home sickness; he called his firstborn Gershom, because he was a sojourner in a strange land. In truth, his whole life seems to have been a lonely one. Miriam is called "the sister of Aaron" even when joining in the song of Moses (xv. 20), and with Aaron she made common cause against their greater brother (Num. xii. 1-2). Zipporah endangered his life rather than obey the covenant of circumcision; she complied at last with a taunt (iv. 24-6), and did not again join him until his victory over Amalek raised his position to the utmost height (xviii. 2).

His children are of no account, and his grandson is the founder of a dangerous and enduring schism (Judges xviii. 30, R.V.).

There is much reason to see here the earliest example of the sad rule that a prophet is not without honour save in his own house; that the law of compensations reaches farther into life than men suppose; and high position and great powers are too often counterbalanced by the isolation of the heart.

CHAPTER III.

THE BURNING BUSH.

ii. 23—iii.

"IN process of time the king of Egypt died," probably the great Raamses, no other of whose dynasty had a reign which extended over the indicated period of time. If so, he had while living every reason to expect an immortal fame, as the greatest among Egyptian kings, a hero, a conqueror on three continents, a builder of magnificent works. But he has only won an immortal notoriety. "Every stone in his buildings was cemented in human blood." The cause he persecuted has made deathless the banished refugee, and has gibbeted the great monarch as a tyrant, whose misplanned severities wrought the ruin of his successor and his army. Such are the reversals of popular judgment: and such the vanity of fame. For all the contemporary fame was his.

"The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried." Another monarch had come at last, a change after sixty-seven years, and yet no change for them! It filled up the measure of their patience, and also of the iniquity of Egypt. We are not told that their cry was addressed to the Lord; what we read is that it reached Him, Who still overhears and pities many a sob, many a lament, which

ought to have been addressed to Him, and is not. Indeed, if His compassion were not to reach men until they had remembered and prayed to Him, who among us would ever have learned to pray to Him at all? Moreover He remembered His covenant with their forefathers, for the fulfilment of which the time had now arrived. "And God saw the children of Israel, and God took knowledge of them."

These were not the cries of religious individuals, but of oppressed masses. It is therefore a solemn question to ask How many such appeals ascend from Christian England? Behold, the hire of labourers . . . held back by fraud crieth out. The half-paid slaves of our haste to be rich, and the victims of our drinking institutions, and of hideous vices which entangle and destroy the innocent and unconscious, what cries to heaven are theirs! As surely as those which St. James records, these have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Of these sufferers every one is His own by purchase, most of them by a covenant and sacrament more solemn than bound Him to His ancient Israel. Surely He hears their groaning. And all whose hearts are touched with compassion, yet who hesitate whether to bestir themselves or to remain inert while evil is masterful and cruel, should remember the anger of God when Moses said, "Send, I pray Thee, by whom Thou wilt send." The Lord is not indifferent. Much less than other sufferers should those who know God be terrified by their afflictions. Cyprian encouraged the Church of his time to endure even unto martyrdom, by the words recorded of ancient Israel, that the more they afflicted them, so much the more they became greater and waxed stronger. And he was right. For all these things

happened to them for ensamples, and were written for our admonition.

It is further to be observed that the people were quite unconscious, until Moses announced it afterwards, that they were heard by God. Yet their deliverer had now been prepared by a long process for his work. We are not to despair because relief does not immediately appear: though He tarry, we are to wait for Him.

While this anguish was being endured in Egypt, Moses was maturing for his destiny. Self-reliance, pride of place, hot and impulsive aggressiveness, were dying in his bosom. To the education of the courtier and scholar was now added that of the shepherd in the wilds, amid the most solemn and awful scenes of nature, in solitude, humiliation, disappointment, and, as we learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in enduring faith. Wordsworth has a remarkable description of the effect of a similar discipline upon the good Lord Clifford. He tells—

> "How he, long forced in humble paths to go,
> Was softened into feeling, soothed and tamed.
>
> "Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,
> His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.
>
> "In him the savage virtues of the race,
> Revenge, and all ferocious thoughts, were dead;
> Nor did he change, but kept in lofty place
> The wisdom which adversity had bred."

There was also the education of advancing age, which teaches many lessons, and among them two which are essential to leadership,—the folly of a hasty blow, and of impulsive reliance upon the support of mobs.

Moses the man-slayer became exceeding meek; and he ceased to rely upon the perception of his people that God by him would deliver them. His distrust, indeed, became as excessive as his temerity had been, but it was an error upon the safer side. "Behold, they will not believe me," he says, "nor hearken unto my voice."

It is an important truth that in very few lives the decisive moment comes just when it is expected. Men allow themselves to be self-indulgent, extravagant and even wicked, often upon the calculation that their present attitude matters little, and they will do very differently when the crisis arrives, the turning-point in their career to nerve them. And they waken up with a start to find their career already decided, their character moulded. As a snare shall the day of the Lord come upon all flesh; and as a snare come all His great visitations meanwhile. When Herod was drinking among bad companions, admiring a shameless dancer, and boasting loudly of his generosity, he was sobered and saddened to discover that he had laughed away the life of his only honest adviser. Moses, like David, was "following the ewes great with young," when summoned by God to rule His people Israel. Neither did the call arrive when he was plunged in moody reverie and abstraction, sighing over his lost fortunes and his defeated aspirations, rebelling against his lowly duties. The humblest labour is a preparation for the brightest revelations, whereas discontent, however lofty, is a preparation for nothing. Thus, too, the birth of Jesus was first announced to shepherds keeping watch over their flock. Yet hundreds of third-rate young persons in every city in this land to-day neglect their work, and unfit themselves for any insight, or any leadership

whatever, by chafing against the obscurity of their vocation.

Who does not perceive that the career of Moses hitherto was divinely directed? The fact that we feel this, although, until now, God has not once been mentioned in his personal story, is surely a fine lesson for those who have only one notion of what edifies—the dragging of the most sacred names and phrases into even the most unsuitable connections. In truth, such a phraseology is much less attractive than a certain tone, a recognition of the unseen, which may at times be more consistent with reverential silence than with obtrusive utterance. It is enough to be ready and fearless when the fitting time comes, which is sure to arrive, for the religious heart as for this narrative—the time for the natural utterance of the great word, God.

We read that the angel of the Lord appeared to him—a remarkable phrase, which was already used in connection with the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. xxii. 11). How much it implies will better be discussed in the twenty-third chapter, where a fuller statement is made. For the present it is enough to note, that this is one pre-eminent angel, indicated by the definite article; that he is clearly the medium of a true divine appearance, because neither the voice nor form of any lesser being is supposed to be employed, the appearance being that of fire, and the words being said to be the direct utterance of the Lord, not of any one who says, Thus saith the Lord. We shall see hereafter that the story of the Exodus is unique in this respect, that in training a people tainted with Egyptian superstitions, no 'similitude' is seen, as when there wrestled a man with Jacob, or when Ezekiel saw a human form upon the sapphire pavement.

Man is the true image of God, and His perfect revelation was in flesh. But now that expression of Himself was perilous, and perhaps unsuitable besides; for He was to be known as the Avenger, and presently as the Giver of Law, with its inflexible conditions and its menaces. Therefore He appeared as fire, which is intense and terrible, even when "the flame of the grace of God does not consume, but illuminates."

There is a notion that religion is languid, repressive, and unmanly. But such is not the scriptural idea. In His presence is the fulness of joy. Christ has come that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly. They who are shut out from His blessedness are said to be asleep and dead. And so Origen quotes this passage among others, with the comment that "As God is a fire, and His angels a flame of fire, and all the saints fervent in spirit, so they who have fallen away from God are said to have cooled, or to have become cold" (*De Princip.*, ii. 8). A revelation by fire involves intensity.

There is indeed another explanation of the burning bush, which makes the flame express only the afflictions that did not consume the people. But this would be a strange adjunct to a divine appearance for their deliverance, speaking rather of the continuance of suffering than of its termination, for which the extinction of such fire would be a more appropriate symbol.

Yet there is an element of truth even in this view, since fire is connected with affliction. In His holiness God is light (with which, in the Hebrew, the very word for holiness seems to be connected); in His judgments He is fire. "The Light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day" (Isa. x. 17).

But God reveals Himself in this thorn bush as a fire which does not consume; and such a revelation tells at once Who has brought the people into affliction, and also that they are not abandoned to it.

To Moses at first there was visible only an extraordinary phenomenon; He turned to see a great sight. It is therefore out of the question to find here the truth, so easy to discover elsewhere, that God rewards the religious inquirer—that they who seek after Him shall find Him. Rather we learn the folly of deeming that the intellect and its inquiries are at war with religion and its mysteries, that revelation is at strife with mental insight, that he who most stupidly refuses to "see the great sights" of nature is best entitled to interpret the voice of God. When the man of science gives ear to voices not of earth, and the man of God has eyes and interest for the divine wonders which surround us, many a discord will be harmonised. With the revival of classical learning came the Reformation.

But it often happens that the curiosity of the intellect is in danger of becoming irreverent, and obtrusive into mysteries not of the brain, and thus the voice of God must speak in solemn warning: "Moses, Moses, . . . Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

After as prolonged a silence as from the time of Malachi to the Baptist, it is God Who reveals Himself once more—not Moses who by searching finds Him out. And this is the established rule. Tidings of the Incarnation came from heaven, or man would not have discovered the Divine Babe. Jesus asked His two first disciples "What seek ye?" and told Simon "Thou shalt be called Cephas," and pronounced the listening

Nathaniel "an Israelite indeed," and bade Zaccheus "make haste and come down," in each case before He was addressed by them.

The first words of Jehovah teach something more than ceremonial reverence. If the dust of common earth on the shoe of Moses may not mingle with that sacred soil, how dare we carry into the presence of our God mean passions and selfish cravings? Observe, too, that while Jacob, when he awoke from his vision, said, "How dreadful is this place!" (Gen. xxviii. 17), God Himself taught Moses to think rather of the holiness than the dread of His abode. Nevertheless Moses also was afraid to look upon God, and hid the face which was thereafter to be veiled, for a nobler reason, when it was itself illumined with the divine glory. Humility before God is thus the path to the highest honour, and reverence, to the closest intercourse.

Meantime the Divine Person has announced Himself: "I am the God of thy father" (father is apparently singular with a collective force), "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." It is a blessing which every Christian parent should bequeath to his child, to be strengthened and invigorated by thinking of God as his father's God.

It was with this memorable announcement that Jesus refuted the Sadducees and established His doctrine of the resurrection. So, then, the bygone ages are not forgotten: Moses may be sure that a kindly relation exists between God and himself, because the kindly relation still exists in all its vital force which once bound Him to those who long since appeared to die. It was impossible, therefore, our Lord inferred, that they had really died at all. The argument is a forerunner of that by which St. Paul concludes, from the resurrec-

tion of Christ, that none who are "in Christ" have perished. Nay, since our Lord was not disputing about immortality only, but the resurrection of the body, His argument implied that a vital relationship with God involved the imperishability of the whole man, since all was His, and in truth the very seal of the covenant was imprinted upon the flesh. How much stronger is the assurance for us, who know that our very bodies are His temple! Now, if any suspicion should arise that the argument, which is really subtle, is over-refined and untrustworthy, let it be observed that no sooner was this announcement made, than God added the proclamation of His own immutability, so that it cannot be said He was, but from age to age His title is I AM. The inference from the divine permanence to the living and permanent vitality of all His relationships is not a verbal quibble, it is drawn from the very central truth of this great scripture.

And now for the first time God calls Israel My people, adopting a phrase already twice employed by earthly rulers (Gen. xxiii. 11, xli. 40), and thus making Himself their king and the champion of their cause. Often afterwards it was used in pathetic appeal:—"Thou hast showed Thy people hard things," "Thou sellest Thy people for nought,"—"Behold, look, we beseech Thee; we are all Thy people" (Ps. lx. 3, xliv. 12; Isa. lxiv. 9). And often it expressed the returning favour of their king: "Hear, O My people, and I will speak"; "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Ps. l. 7; Isa. xl. 1).

It is used of the nation at large, all of whom were brought into the covenant, although with many of them God was not well pleased. And since it does not belong only to saints, but speaks of a grace which

might be received in vain, it is a strong appeal to all Christian people, all who are within the New Covenant. Them also the Lord claims and pities, and would gladly emancipate: their sorrows also He knows. "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." Thus the ways of God exceed the desires of men. Their subsequent complaints are evidence that Egypt had become their country: gladly would they have shaken off the iron yoke, but a successful rebellion is a revolution, not an Exodus. Their destined home was very different: with the widest variety of climate, scenery, and soil, a land which demanded much more regular husbandry, but rewarded labour with exuberant fertility. Secluded from heathenism by deserts on the south and east, by a sublime range of mountains on the north, and by a sea with few havens on the west, yet planted in the very bosom of all the ancient civilisation which at the last it was to leaven, it was a land where a faithful people could have dwelt alone and not been reckoned among the nations, yet where the scourge for disobedience was never far away.

Next after the promise of this good land, the commission of Moses is announced. He is to act, because God is already active: "*I* am come down to deliver them . . come now, therefore, and I will send *thee* unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people." And let this truth encourage all who are truly sent of God, to the end of time, that He does not send us to deliver man, until He is Himself prepared to do so;

that when our fears ask, like Moses, Who am I, that I should go? He does not answer, Thou art capable, but Certainly I will go with thee. So, wherever the ministry of the word is sent, there is a true purpose of grace. There is also the presence of One who claims the right to bestow upon us the same encouragement which was given to Moses by Jehovah, saying, "Lo, I am with you alway." In so saying, Jesus made Himself equal with God.

And as this ancient revelation of God was to give rest to a weary and heavy-laden people, so Christ bound together the assertion of a more perfect revelation, made in Him, with the promise of a grander emancipation. No man knoweth the Father save by revelation of the Son is the doctrine which introduces the great offer "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 27, 28). The claims of Christ in the New Testament will never be fully recognised until a careful study is made of His treatment of the functions which in the Old Testament are regarded as Divine. A curious expression follows: "This shall be a token unto thee that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain." It seems but vague encouragement, to offer Moses, hesitating at the moment, a token which could take effect only when his task was wrought. And yet we know how much easier it is to believe what is thrown into distinct shape and particularised. Our trust in good intentions is helped when their expression is detailed and circumstantial, as a candidate for office will reckon all general assurances of support much cheaper than a pledge to canvass certain electors within a certain time. Such is the constitution of

human nature; and its Maker has often deigned to sustain its weakness by going thus into particulars. He does the same for us, condescending to embody the most profound of all mysteries in sacramental emblems, clothing his promises of our future blessedness in much detail, and in concrete figures which at least symbolise, if they do not literally describe, the glories of the Jerusalem which is above.

A NEW NAME.

iii. 14. vi. 2, 3.

"God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."

We cannot certainly tell why Moses asked for a new name by which to announce to his brethren the appearance of God. He may have felt that the memory of their fathers, and of the dealings of God with them, had faded so far out of mind that merely to indicate their ancestral God would not sufficiently distinguish Him from the idols of Egypt, whose worship had infected them.

If so, he was fully answered by a name which made this God the one reality, in a world where all is a phantasm except what derives stability from Him.

He may have desired to know, for himself, whether there was any truth in the dreamy and fascinating pantheism which inspired so much of the Egyptian superstition.

In that case, the answer met his question by declaring that God existed, not as the sum of things or soul of the universe, but in Himself, the only independent Being.

Or he may simply have desired some name to

express more of the mystery of deity, remembering how a change of name had accompanied new discoveries of human character and achievement, as of Abraham and Israel; and expecting a new name likewise when God would make to His people new revelations of Himself.

So natural an expectation was fulfilled not only then, but afterwards. When Moses prayed "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory," the answer was "I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord." The proclamation was again Jehovah, but not this alone. It was "The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (xxxiii. 18, 19, xxxiv. 6, R.V.) Thus the life of Moses, like the agelong progress of the Church, advanced towards an ever-deepening knowledge that God is not only the Independent but the Good. All sets toward the final knowledge that His highest name is Love.

Meanwhile, in the development of events, the exact period was come for epithets, which were shared with gods many and lords many, to be supplemented by the formal announcement and authoritative adoption of His proper name Jehovah. The infant nation was to learn to think of Him, not only as endowed with attributes of terror and power, by which enemies would be crushed, but as possessing a certain well-defined personality, upon which the trust of man could repose. Soon their experience would enable them to receive the formal announcement that He was merciful and gracious. But first they were required to trust His promise amid all discouragements; and to this end, stability was the attribute first to be insisted upon.

It is true that the derivation of the word Jehovah is

still a problem for critical acumen. It has been sought in more than one language, and various shades of meaning have been assigned to it, some untenable in the abstract, others hardly, or not at all, to be reconciled with the Scriptural narrative.

Nay, the corruption of the very sound is so notorious, that it is only worth mention as illustrating a phase of superstition.

We smile at the Jews, removing the correct vowels lest so holy a word should be irreverently spoken, placing the sanctity in the cadence, hoping that light and flippant allusions may offend God less, so long as they spare at least the vowels of His name, and thus preserve some vestige undesecrated, while profaning at once the conception of His majesty and the consonants of the mystic word.

A more abject superstition could scarcely have made void the spirit, while grovelling before the letter of the commandment.

But this very superstition is alive in other forms to-day. Whenever one recoils from the sin of coarse blasphemy, yet allows himself the enjoyment of a polished literature which profanes holy conceptions,—whenever men feel bound to behave with external propriety in the house of God, yet bring thither wandering thoughts, vile appetites, sensuous imaginations, and all the chamber of imagery which is within the unregenerate heart,—there is the same despicable superstition which strove to escape at least the extreme of blasphemy by prudently veiling the Holy Name before profaning it.

But our present concern is with the practical message conveyed to Israel when Moses declared that Jehovah, I AM, the God of their fathers, had appeared unto him.

And if we find in it a message suited for the time, and which is the basis, not the superstructure, both of later messages and also of the national character, then we shall not fail to observe the bearing of such facts upon an urgent controversy of this time.

Some significance must have been in that Name, not too abstract for a servile and degenerate race to apprehend. Nor was it soon to pass away and be replaced; it was His memorial throughout all generations; and therefore it has a message for us to-day, to admonish and humble, to invigorate and uphold.

That God would be the same to them as to their fathers was much. But that it was of the essence of His character to be evermore the same, immutable in heart and mind and reality of being, however their conduct might modify His bearing towards them, this indeed would be a steadying and reclaiming consciousness.

Accordingly Moses receives the answer for himself, "I AM THAT I AM"; and he is bidden to tell his people "I AM hath sent me unto you," and yet again "JEHOVAH the God of your fathers hath sent me unto you." The spirit and tenor of these three names may be said to be virtually comprehended in the first; and they all speak of the essential and self-existent Being, unchanging and unchangeable.

I AM expresses an intense reality of being. No image in the dark recesses of Egyptian or Syrian temples, grotesque and motionless, can win the adoration of him who has had communion with such a veritable existence, or has heard His authentic message. No dreamful pantheism, on its knees to the beneficent principle expressed in one deity, to the destructive in another, or to the reproductive in a third, but all of

them dependent upon nature, as the rainbow upon the cataract which it spans, can ever again satisfy the soul which is athirst for the living God, the Lord, Who is not personified, but IS.

This profound sense of a living Person within reach, to be offended, to pardon, and to bless, was the one force which kept the Hebrew nation itself alive, with a vitality unprecedented since the world began. They could crave His pardon, whatever natural retributions they had brought down upon themselves, whatever tendencies of nature they had provoked, because He was not a dead law without ears or a heart, but their merciful and gracious God.

Not the most exquisite subtleties of innuendo and irony could make good for a day the monstrous paradox that the Hebrew religion, the worship of I AM, was really nothing but the adoration of that stream of tendencies which makes for righteousness.

Israel did not challenge Pharaoh through having suddenly discovered that goodness ultimately prevails over evil, nor is it any cold calculation of the sort which ever inspires a nation or a man with heroic fortitude. But they were nerved by the announcement that they had been remembered by a God Who is neither an ideal nor a fancy, but the Reality of realities, beside Whom Pharaoh and his host were but as phantoms.

I AM THAT I AM is the style not only of permanence, but of permanence self-contained, and being a distinctive title, it denies such self-contained permanence to others.

Man is as the past has moulded him, a compound of attainments and failures, discoveries and disillusions, his eyes dim with forgotten tears, his hair grey with surmounted anxieties, his brow furrowed with bygone

studies, his conscience troubled with old sin. Modern unbelief is ignobly frank respecting him. He is the sum of his parents and his wet-nurse. He is what he eats. If he drinks beer, he thinks beer. And it is the element of truth in these hideous paradoxes which makes them rankle, like an unkind construction put upon a questionable action. As the foam is what wind and tide have made of it, so are we the product of our circumstances, the resultant of a thousand forces, far indeed from being self-poised or self-contained, too often false to our best self, insomuch that probably no man is actually what in the depth of self-consciousness he feels himself to be, what moreover he should prove to be, if only the leaden weight of constraining circumstance were lifted off the spring which it flattens down to earth. Moses himself was at heart a very different person from the keeper of the sheep of Jethro. Therefore man says, Pity and make allowance for me: this is not my true self, but only what by compression, by starvation and stripes and bribery and error, I have become. Only God says, I AM THAT I AM.

Yet in another sense, and quite as deep a one, man is not the coarse tissue which past circumstances have woven: he is the seed of the future, as truly as the fruit of the past. Strange compound that he is of memory and hope, while half of the present depends on what is over, the other half is projected into the future; and like a bridge, sustained on these two banks, life throws its quivering shadow on each moment that fleets by. It is not attainment, but degradation to live upon the level of one's mere attainment, no longer uplifted by any aspiration, fired by any emulation, goaded by any but carnal fears. If we have been shaped by circumstances, yet we are saved by hope

Do not judge me, we are all entitled to plead, by anything that I am doing or have done: He only can appraise a soul a right Who knows what it yearns to become, what within itself it hates and prays to be delivered from, what is the earnestness of its self-loathing, what the passion of its appeal to heaven. As the bloom of next April is the true comment upon the dry bulb of September, as you do not value the fountain by the pint of water in its basin, but by its inexhaustible capabilities of replenishment, so the present and its joyless facts are not the true man; his possibilities, the fears and hopes that control his destiny and shall unfold it, these are his real self.

I am not merely what I am: I am very truly that which I long to be. And thus, man may plead, I am what I move towards and strive after, my aspiration is myself. But God says, I AM WHAT I AM. The stream hurries forward: the rock abides. And this is the Rock of Ages.

Now, such a conception is at first sight not far removed from that apathetic and impassive kind of deity which the practical atheism of ancient materialists could well afford to grant;—"ever in itself enjoying immortality together with supreme repose, far removed and withdrawn from our concerns, since it, exempt from every pain, exempt from all danger, strong in its own resources and wanting nought from us, is neither gained by favour nor moved by wrath."

Thus Lucretius conceived of the absolute Being as by the necessity of its nature entirely outside our system.

But Moses was taught to trust in Jehovah as intervening, pitying sorrow and wrong, coming down to assist His creatures in distress.

How could this be possible? Clearly the movement

towards them must be wholly disinterested, and wholly from within ; unbought, since no external influence can modify His condition, no puny sacrifice can propitiate Him Who sitteth upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers : a movement prompted by no irregular emotional impulse, but an abiding law of His nature, incapable of change, the movement of a nature, personal indeed, yet as steady, as surely to be reckoned upon in like circumstances, as the operations of gravitation are.

There is no such motive, working in such magnificent regularity for good, save one. The ultimate doctrine of the New Testament, that God is Love, is already involved in this early assertion, that being wholly independent of us and our concerns, He is yet not indifferent to them, so that Moses could say unto the children of Israel "I AM hath sent me unto you."

It is this unchangeable consistency of Divine action which gives the narrative its intense interest to us. To Moses, and therefore to all who receive any commission from the skies, this title said, Frail creature, sport of circumstances and of tyrants, He who commissions thee sits above the waterfloods, and their rage can as little modify or change His purpose, now committed to thy charge, as the spray can quench the stars. Perplexed creature, whose best self lives only in aspiration and desire, now thou art an instrument in the hand of Him with Whom desire and attainment, will and fruition, are eternally the same. None truly fails in fighting for Jehovah, for who hath resisted His will ?

To Israel, and to all the oppressed whose minds are open to receive the tidings and their faith strong to embrace it, He said, Your life is blighted, and your

future is in the hand of taskmasters, yet be of good cheer, for now your deliverance is undertaken by Him Whose being and purpose are one, Who *is* in perfection of enjoyment all that He *is* in contemplation and in will. The rescue of Israel by an immutable and perfect God is the earnest of the breaking of every yoke.

And to the proud and godless world which knows Him not, He says, Resistance to My will can only show forth all its power, which is not at the mercy of opinion or interest or change: I sit upon the throne, not only supreme but independent, not only victorious but unassailable; self-contained, self-poised and self-sufficing, I AM THAT I AM.

Have we now escaped the inert and self-absorbed deity of Lucretius, only to fall into the palsying grasp of the tyrannous deity of Calvin? Does our own human will shrivel up and become powerless under the compulsion of that immutability with which we are strangely brought into contact?

Evidently this is not the teaching of the Book of Exodus. For it is here, in this revelation of the Supreme, that we first hear of a nation as being His: "I have seen the affliction of My people which is in Egypt . . . and I have come down to bring them into a good land." They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Yet their carcases fell in the wilderness. And these things were written for our learning. The immutability, which suffers no shock when we enter *into* the covenant, remains unshaken also if we depart from the living God. The sun shines alike when we raise the curtain and when we drop it, when our chamber is illumined and when it is dark. The immutability of God is not in His operations, for

sometimes He gave His people into the hand of their enemies, and again He turned and helped them. It is in His nature, His mind, in the principles which guide His actions. If He had not chastened David for his sin, then, by acting as before, He would have been other at heart than when He rejected Saul for disobedience and chose the son of Jesse to fulfil all His word. The wind has veered, if it continues to propel the vessel in the same direction, although helm and sails are shifted.

Such is the Pauline doctrine of His immutability. "If we endure we shall also reign with Him: if we shall deny Him, He also will deny us,"—and such is the necessity of His being, for we cannot sway Him with our changes: "if we are faithless, He abideth faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." And therefore it is presently added that "the firm foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having" not only "this seal, that the Lord knoweth those that are His,"—but also this, "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness" (2 Tim. ii. 12, 13, 19, R.V.).

The Lord knew that Israel was His, yet for their unrighteousness He sware in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest.

It follows from all this that the new name of God was no academic subtlety, no metaphysical refinement of the schools, unfitly revealed to slaves, but a most practical and inspiring truth, a conviction to warm their blood, to rouse their courage, to convert their despair into confidence and their alarms into defiance.

They had the support of a God worthy of trust. And thenceforth every answer in righteousness, every new disclosure of fidelity, tenderness, love, was not an abnormal phenomenon, the uncertain grace of

a capricious despot; no, its import was permanent as an observation of the stars by an astronomer, ever more to be remembered in calculating the movements of the universe.

In future troubles they could appeal to Him to awake as in the ancient days, as being He who "cut Rahab and wounded the Dragon." "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

And as the sublime and beautiful conception of a loving spiritual God was built up slowly, age by age, tier upon tier, this was the foundation which insured the the stability of all, until the Head Stone of the Corner gave completeness to the vast design, until men saw and could believe in the very Incarnation of all Love, unshaken amid anguish and distress and seeming failure, immovable, victorious, while they heard from human lips the awful words, "Before Abraham was, I AM." Then they learned to identify all this ancient lesson of trustworthiness with new and more pathetic revelations of affection: and the martyr at the stake grew strong as he remembered that the Man of Sorrows was the same yesterday and to-day and for ever; and the great apostle, prostrate before the glory of his Master, was restored by the touch of a human hand, and by the voice of Him upon Whose bosom he had leaned, saying, Fear not, I am the First and the Last and the Living One.

And if men are once more fain to rend from humanity that great assurance, which for ages, amid all shocks, has made the frail creature of the dust to grow strong and firm and fearless, partaker of the Divine Nature, what will they give us in its stead? Or do they think us too strong of will, too firm of purpose? Looking around us, we see nations heaving with internal agitations, armed to the teeth against each other,

and all things like a ship at sea reeling to and fro, and staggering like a drunken man. There is no stability for us in constitutions or old formulæ—none anywhere, if it be not in the soul of man. Well for us, then, that the anchor of the soul is sure and steadfast! well that unnumbered millions take courage from their Saviour's word, that the world's worst anguish is the beginning, not of dissolution, but of the birth-pangs of a new heaven and earth,—that when the clouds are blackest because the light of sun and moon is quenched, then, then we shall behold the Immutable unveiled, the Son of Man, who is brought nigh unto the Ancient of Days, now sitting in the clouds of heaven, and coming in the glory of His Father!

THE COMMISSION.

iii. 10, 16-22.

We have already learned from the seventh verse that God commissioned Moses, only when He had Himself descended to deliver Israel. He sends none, except with the implied or explicit promise that certainly He will be with them. But the converse is also true. If God sends no man but when He comes Himself, He never comes without demanding the agency of man. The overruled reluctance of Moses, and the inflexible urgency of his commission, may teach us the honour set by God upon humanity. He has knit men together in the mutual dependence of nations and of families, that each may be His minister to all; and in every great crisis of history He has respected His own principle, and has visited the race by means of the providential man. The gospel was not preached by angels. Its first agents found themselves like sheep among wolves:

they were an exhibition to the world and to angels and men, yet necessity was laid upon them, and a woe if they preached it not.

All the best gifts of heaven come to us by the agency of inventor and sage, hero and explorer, organiser and philanthropist, patriot, reformer and saint. And the hope which inspires their grandest effort is never that of selfish gain, nor even of fame, though fame is a keen spur, which perhaps God set before Moses in the noble hope that "thou shalt bring forth the people" (ver. 12). But the truly impelling force is always the great deed itself, the haunting thought, the importunate inspiration, the inward fire; and so God promises Moses neither a sceptre, nor share in the good land: He simply proposes to him the work, the rescue of the people; and Moses, for his part, simply objects that he is unable, not that he is solicitous about his reward. Whatever is done for payment can be valued by its cost: all the priceless services done for us by our greatest were, in very deed, unpriced.

Moses, with the new name of God to reveal, and with the assurance that He is about to rescue Israel, is bidden to go to work advisedly and wisely. He is not to appeal to the mob, nor yet to confront Pharaoh without authority from his people to speak for them, nor is he to make the great demand for emancipation abruptly and at once. The mistake of forty years ago must not be repeated now. He is to appeal to the elders of Israel; and with them, and therefore clearly representing the nation, he is respectfully to crave permission for a three days' journey, to sacrifice to Jehovah in the wilderness. The blustering assurance with which certain fanatics of our own time first assume that they possess a direct commission from the skies, and thereupon that they

are freed from all order, from all recognition of any human authority, and then that no considerations of prudence or of decency should restrain the violence and bad taste which they mistake for zeal, is curiously unlike anything in the Old Testament or the New. Was ever a commission more direct than those of Moses and of St. Paul? Yet Moses was to obtain the recognition of the elders of his people; and St. Paul received formal ordination by the explicit command of God (Acts xiii. 3).

Strangely enough, it is often assumed that this demand for a furlough of three days was insincere. But it would only have been so, if consent were expected, and if the intention were thereupon to abuse the respite and refuse to return. There is not the slightest hint of any duplicity of the kind. The real motives for the demand are very plain. The excursion which they proposed would have taught the people to move and act together, reviving their national spirit, and filling them with a desire for the liberty which they tasted. In the very words which they should speak, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, hath met with us," there is a distinct proclamation of nationality, and of its surest and strongest bulwark, a national religion. From such an excursion, therefore, the people would have returned, already well-nigh emancipated, and with recognised leaders. Certainly Pharaoh could not listen to any such proposal, unless he were prepared to reverse the whole policy of his dynasty toward Israel.

But the refusal answered two good ends. In the first place it joined issue on the best conceivable ground, for Israel was exhibited making the least possible demand with the greatest possible courtesy—"Let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilder-

ness." Not even so much would be granted. The tyrant was palpably in the wrong, and thenceforth it was perfectly reasonable to increase the severity of the terms after each of his defeats, which proceeding in its turn made concession more and more galling to his pride. In the second place, the quarrel was from the first avowedly and undeniably religious: the gods of Egypt were matched against Jehovah; and in the successive plagues which desolated his land Pharaoh gradually learnt Who Jehovah was.

In the message which Moses should convey to the elders there are two significant phrases. He was to announce in the name of God, "I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done unto you in Egypt." The silent observation of God before He interposes is very solemn and instructive. So in the Revelation, He walks among the golden candlesticks, and knows the work, the patience, or the unfaithfulness of each. So He is not far from any one of us. When a heavy blow falls we speak of it as "a Visitation of Providence," but in reality the visitation has been long before. Neither Israel nor Egypt was conscious of the solemn presence. Who knows what soul of man, or what nation, is thus visited to-day, for future deliverance or rebuke?

Again it is said, "I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt into . . . a land flowing with milk and honey." Their affliction was the divine method of uprooting them. And so is our affliction the method by which our hearts are released from love of earth and life, that in due time He may "surely bring us in" to a better and an enduring country. Now, we wonder that the Israelites clung so fondly to the place of their captivity. But what of our own hearts? Have they

a desire to depart? or do they groan in bondage, and yet recoil from their emancipation?

The hesitating nation is not plainly told that their affliction will be intensified and their lives made burdensome with labour. That is perhaps implied in the certainty that Pharaoh "will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand." But it is with Israel as with us: a general knowledge that in the world we shall have tribulation is enough; the catalogue of our trials is not spread out before us in advance. They were assured for their encouragement that all their long captivity should at last receive its wages, for they should not borrow* but ask of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and gold, and raiment, and they should spoil the Egyptians. So are we taught to have "respect unto the recompense of the reward."

* So much ignorant capital has been made by sceptics out of this unfortunate mistranslation, that it is worth while to inquire whether the word "borrow" would suit the context in other passages. "He *borrowed* water and she gave him milk" (Judges v. 25). "The Lord said unto Solomon, Because thou hast *borrowed* this thing, and hast not *borrowed* long life for thyself, neither hast *borrowed* riches for thyself, nor hast *borrowed* the life of thine enemies" (1 Kings iii. 11). "And Elijah said unto Elisha, Thou hast *borrowed* a hard thing" (2 Kings ii. 10). The absurdity of the cavil is self-evident.

CHAPTER IV.

MOSES HESITATES.

iv. 1-17.

HOLY Scripture is impartial, even towards its heroes. The sin of David is recorded, and the failure of Peter. And so is the reluctance of Moses to accept his commission, even after a miracle had been vouchsafed to him for encouragement. The absolute sinlessness of Jesus is the more significant because it is found in the records of a creed which knows of no idealised humanity.

In Josephus, the refusal of Moses is softened down. Even the modest words, "Lord, I am still in doubt how I, a private man and of no abilities, should persuade my countrymen or Pharaoh," are not spoken after the sign is given. Nor is there any mention of the transfer to Aaron of a part of his commission, nor of their joint offence at Meribah, nor of its penalty, which in Scripture is bewailed so often. And Josephus is equally tender about the misdeeds of the nation. We hear nothing of their murmurs against Moses and Aaron when their burdens are increased, or of their making the golden calf. Whereas it is remarkable and natural that the fear of Moses is less anxious about his reception by the tyrant than by his own people: "Behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee." This is very unlike the invention of a

later period, glorifying the beginnings of the nation; but it is absolutely true to life. Great men do not fear the wrath of enemies if they can be secured against the indifference and contempt of friends; and Moses in particular was at last persuaded to undertake his mission by the promise of the support of Aaron. His hesitation is therefore the earliest example of what has been so often since observed—the discouragement of heroes, reformers and messengers from God, less by fear of the attacks of the world than of the contemptuous scepticism of the people of God. We often sigh for the appearing, in our degenerate days, of

> "A man with heart, head, hand,
> Like some of the simple great ones gone."

Yet who shall say that the want of them is not our own fault? The critical apathy and incredulity, not of the world but of the Church, is what freezes the fountains of Christian daring and the warmth of Christian zeal.

For the help of the faith of his people, Moses is commissioned to work two miracles; and he is caused to rehearse them, for his own.

Strange tales were told among the later Jews about his wonder-working rod. It was cut by Adam before leaving Paradise, was brought by Noah into the ark, passed into Egypt with Joseph, and was recovered by Moses while he enjoyed the favour of the court. These legends arose from downright moral inability to receive the true lesson of the incident, which is the confronting of the sceptre of Egypt with the simple staff of the shepherd, the choosing of the weak things of earth to confound the strong, the power of God to work His miracles by the most puny and inadequate means.

Anything was more credible than that He who led His people like sheep did indeed guide them with a common shepherd's crook. And yet this was precisely the lesson meant for us to learn—the glorification of poor resources in the grasp of faith.

Both miracles were of a menacing kind. First the rod became a serpent, to declare that at God's bidding enemies would rise up against the oppressor, even where all seemed innocuous, as in truth the waters of the river and the dust of the furnace and the winds of heaven conspired against him. Then, in the grasp of Moses, the serpent from which he fled became a rod again, to intimate that these avenging forces were subject to the servant of Jehovah.

Again, his hand became leprous in his bosom, and was presently restored to health again—a declaration that he carried with him the power of death, in its most dreadful form; and perhaps a still more solemn admonition to those who remember what leprosy betokens, and how every approach of God to man brings first the knowledge of sin, to be followed by the assurance that He has cleansed it.*

If the people would not hearken to the voice of the first sign, they should believe the second; but at the

* Tertullian appealed to the second of these miracles to illustrate the possibility of the resurrection. "The hand of Moses is changed and becomes like that of the dead, bloodless, colourless, and stiff with cold. But on the recovery of heat and restoration of its natural colour, it is the same flesh and blood. . . So will changes, conversions and reformation be needed to bring about the resurrection, yet the substance will be preserved safe." (*De Res.*, lv.) It is far wiser to be content with the declaration of St. Paul that the identity of the body does not depend on that of its corporeal atoms. "Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but a naked grain. . . . But God giveth . . . to every seed his own body" (1 Cor. xv. 37-8).

worst, and if they were still unconvinced, they would believe when they saw the water of the Nile, the pride and glory of their oppressors, turned into blood before their eyes. That was an omen which needs no interpretation. What follows is curious. Moses objects that he has not hitherto been eloquent, nor does he experience any improvement "since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant" (a graphic touch!), and he seems to suppose that the popular choice between liberty and slavery would depend less upon the evidence of a Divine power than upon sleight of tongue, as if he were in modern England.

But let it be observed that the self-consciousness which wears the mask of humility while refusing to submit its judgment to that of God, is a form of selfishness—self-absorption blinding one to other considerations beyond himself—as real, though not as hateful, as greed and avarice and lust.

How can Moses call himself slow of speech and of a slow tongue, when Stephen distinctly declares that he was mighty in word as well as deed? (Acts vii. 22). Perhaps it is enough to answer that many years of solitude in a strange land had robbed him of his fluency. Perhaps Stephen had in mind the words of the Book of Wisdom, that "Wisdom entered into the soul of the servant of the Lord, and withstood dreadful kings in wonders and signs. . . . For Wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the tongues of them that cannot speak eloquent" (Wisdom x. 16, 21).

To his scruple the answer was returned, "Who hath made man's mouth? . . . Have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say." The same encouragement belongs to every one who truly executes a mandate

from above; "Lo, I am with you alway." For surely this encouragement *is* the same. Surely Jesus did not mean to offer His own presence as a substitute for that of God, but as being in very truth Divine, when He bade His disciples, in reliance upon Him, to go forth and convert the world.

And this is the true test which divides faith from presumption, and unbelief from prudence: do we go because God is with us in Christ, or because we ourselves are strong and wise? Do we hold back because we are not sure of *His* commission, or only because we distrust ourselves? "Humility without faith is too timorous; faith without humility is too hasty." The phrase explains the conduct of Moses both now and forty years before.

Moses, however, still entreats that any one may be chosen rather than himself: "Send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send."

And thereupon the anger of the Lord was kindled against him, although at the moment his only visible punishment was the partial granting of his prayer—the association with him in his commission of Aaron, who could speak well, the forfeiting of a certain part of his vocation, and with it of a certain part of its reward. The words, "Is not Aaron thy brother the Levite?" have been used to insinuate that the tribal arrangement was not perfected when they were written, and so to discredit the narrative. But when so interpreted they yield no adequate sense, they do not reinforce the argument; while they are perfectly intelligible as implying that Aaron is already the leader of his tribe, and therefore sure to obtain the hearing of which Moses despaired. But the arrangement involved grave consequences sure to be developed in

due time: among others, the reliance of Israel upon a feebler will, which could be forced by their clamour to make them a calf of gold. Moses was yet to learn that lesson which our century knows nothing of,—that a speaker and a leader of nations are not the same. When he cried to Aaron, in the bitterness of his soul, "What did this people to thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" did he remember by whose unfaithfulness Aaron had been thrust into the office, the responsibilities of which he had betrayed?

Now, it is the duty of every man, to whom a special vocation presents itself, to set opposite each other two considerations. Dare I undertake this task? is a solemn question, but so is this: Dare I let this task go past me? Am I prepared for the responsibility of allowing it to drift into weaker hands? These are days when the Church of Christ is calling for the help of every one capable of aiding her, and we ought to hear it said more often that one is afraid *not* to teach in Sunday School, and another dares not refuse a proffered district, and a third fears to leave charitable tasks undone. To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin; and we hear too much about the terrible responsibility of working for God, but too little about the still graver responsibility of refusing to work for Him when called.

Moses indeed attained so much that we are scarcely conscious that he might have been greater still. He had once presumed to go unsent, and brought upon himself the exile of half a lifetime. Again he presumed almost to say, I go not, and well-nigh to incur the guilt of Jonah when sent to Nineveh, and in so doing he forfeited the fulness of his vocation. But who reaches the level of his possibilities? Who is not haunted by

faces, "each one a murdered self," a nobler self, that might have been, and is now impossible for ever? Only Jesus could say "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." And it is notable that while Jesus deals, in the parable of the labourers, with the problem of equal faithfulness during longer and shorter periods of employment; and in the parable of the pounds with that of equal endowment variously improved; and yet again, in the parable of the talents, with the problem of various endowments all doubled alike, He always draws a veil over the treatment of five talents which earn but two or three besides.

A more cheerful reflection suggested by this narrative is the strange power of human fellowship. Moses knew and was persuaded that God, Whose presence was even then miraculously apparent in the bush, and Who had invested him with superhuman powers, would go with him. There is no trace of incredulity in his behaviour, but only of failure to rely, to cast his shrinking and reluctant will upon the truth he recognised and the God Whose presence he confessed. He held back, as many a one does, who is honest when he repeats the Creed in church, yet fails to submit his life to the easy yoke of Jesus. Nor is it from physical peril that he recoils: at the bidding of God he has just grasped the serpent from which he fled; and in confronting a tyrant with armies at his back, he could hope for small assistance from his brother. But highly strung spirits, in every great crisis, are aware of vague indefinite apprehensions that are not cowardly but imaginative. Thus Cæsar, when defying the hosts of Pompey, is said to have been disturbed by an apparition. It is vain to put these apprehensions into logical form, and argue them down: the slowness of speech of

Moses was surely refuted by the presence of God, Who makes the mouth and inspires the utterance; but such fears lie deeper than the reasons they assign, and when argument fails, will yet stubbornly repeat their cry: "Send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send." Now this shrinking, which is not craven, is dispelled by nothing so effectually as by the touch of a human hand. It is like the voice of a friend to one beset by ghostly terrors: he does not expect his comrade to exorcise a spirit, and yet his apprehensions are dispelled. Thus Moses cannot summon up courage from the protection of God, but when assured of the companionship of his brother he will not only venture to return to Egypt, but will bring with him his wife and children. Thus, also, He Who knew what was in men's hearts sent forth His missionaries, both the Twelve and the Seventy (as we have yet to learn the true economy of sending ours), "by two and two" (Mark vi. 7; Luke x. 1).

This is the principle which underlies the institution of the Church of Christ, and the conception that Christians are brothers, among whom the strong must help the weak. Such help from their fellow-mortals would perhaps decide the choice of many hesitating souls, upon the verge of the divine life, recoiling from its unknown and dread experiences, but longing for a sympathising comrade. Alas for the unkindly and unsympathetic religion of men whose faith has never warmed a human heart, and of congregations in which emotion is a misdemeanour!

There is no stronger force, among all that make for the abuses of priestcraft, than this same yearning for human help becomes when robbed of its proper nourishment, which is the communion of saints, and the

pastoral care of souls. Has it no further nourishment than these? This instinctive craving for a Brother to help as well as a Father to direct and govern,—this social instinct, which banished the fears of Moses and made him set out for Egypt long before Aaron came in sight, content when assured of Aaron's co-operation,—is there nothing in God Himself to respond to it? He Who is not ashamed to call us brethren has profoundly modified the Church's conception of Jehovah, the Eternal, Absolute and Unconditioned. It is because He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, that we are bidden to draw near with boldness unto the Throne of Grace. There is no heart so lonely that it cannot commune with the lofty and kind humanity of Jesus.

There is a homelier lesson to be learned. Moses was not only solaced by human fellowship, but nerved and animated by the thought of his brother, and the mention of his tribe. "Is not Aaron thy brother the Levite?" They had not met for forty years. Vague rumours of deadly persecution were doubtless all that had reached the fugitive, whose heart had burned, in solitary communion with Nature in her sternest forms, as he brooded over the wrongs of his family, of Aaron, and perhaps of Miriam.

And now his brother lived. The call which Moses would have put from him was for the emancipation of his own flesh and blood, and for their greatness. In that great hour, domestic affection did much to turn the scale wherein the destinies of humanity were trembling. And his was affection well returned. It might easily have been otherwise, for Aaron had seen his younger brother called to a dazzling elevation, living in enviable magnificence, and earning fame by "word and deed"; and then, after a momentary fusion

of sympathy and of condition, forty years had poured between them a torrent of cares and joys estranging because unshared. But it was promised that Aaron, when he saw him, should be glad at heart; and the words throw a beam of exquisite light into the depths of the mighty soul which God inspired to emancipate Israel and to found His Church, by thoughts of his brother's joy on meeting him.

Let no man dream of attaining real greatness by stifling his affections. The heart is more important than the intellect; and the brief story of the Exodus has room for the yearning of Jochebed over her infant "when she saw him that he was a goodly child," for the bold inspiration of the young poetess, who "stood afar off to know what should be done to him," and now for the love of Aaron. So the Virgin, in the dread hour of her reproach, went in haste to her cousin Elizabeth. So Andrew "findeth first his own brother Simon." And so the Divine Sufferer, forsaken of God, did not forsake His mother.

The Bible is full of domestic life. It is the theme of the greater part of Genesis, which makes the family the seed-plot of the Church. It is wisely recognised again at the moment when the larger pulse of the nation begins to beat. For the life-blood in the heart of a nation must be the blood in the hearts of men.

MOSES OBEYS.

iv. 18-31.

Moses is now commissioned: he is to go to Egypt, and Aaron is coming thence to meet him. Yet he first returns to Midian, to Jethro, who is both his employer

and the head of the family, and prays him to sanction his visit to his own people.

There are duties which no family resistance can possibly cancel, and the direct command of God made it plain that this was one of them. But there are two ways of performing even the most imperative obligation, and religious people have done irreparable mischief before now, by rudeness, disregard to natural feeling and the rights of their fellow-men, under the impression that they showed their allegiance to God by outraging other ties. It is a theory for which no sanction can be found either in Holy Scripture or in common sense.

When he asks permission to visit "his brethren" we cannot say whether he ever had brothers besides Aaron, or uses the word in the same larger national sense as when we read that, forty years before, he went out unto his brethren and saw their burdens. What is to be observed is that he is reticent with respect to his vast expectations and designs.

He does not argue that, because a Divine promise must needs be fulfilled, he need not be discreet, wary and taciturn, any more than St. Paul supposed, because the lives of his shipmates were promised to him, that it mattered nothing whether the sailors remained on board.

The decrees of God have sometimes been used to justify the recklessness of man, but never by His chosen followers. They have worked out their own salvation the more earnestly because God worked in them. And every good cause calls aloud for human energy and wisdom, all the more because its consummation is the will of God, and sooner or later is assured. Moses has unlearned his rashness.

When the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, "Go, return unto Egypt, for all the men are dead which sought thy life," there is an almost verbal resemblance to the words in which the infant Jesus is recalled from exile. We shall have to consider the typical aspect of the whole narrative, when a convenient stage is reached for pausing to survey it in its completeness. But resemblances like this have been treated with so much scorn, they have been so freely perverted into evidence of the mythical nature of the later story, that some passing allusion appears desirable. We must beware equally of both extremes. The Old Testament is tortured, and genuine prophecies are made no better than coincidences, when coincidences are exalted to all the dignity of express predictions. One can scarcely venture to speak of the death of Herod when Jesus was to return from Egypt, as being deliberately typified in the death of those who sought the life of Moses. But it is quite clear that the words in St. Matthew do intentionally point the reader back to this narrative. For, indeed, under both, there are to be recognised the same principles: that God does not thrust His servants into needless or excessive peril; and that when the life of a tyrant has really become not only a trial but a barrier, it will be removed by the King of kings. God is prudent for His heroes.

Moreover, we must recognise the lofty fitness of what is very visible in the Gospels—the coming to a head in Christ of the various experiences of the people of God; and at the recurrence, in His story, of events already known elsewhere, we need not be disquieted, as if the suspicion of a myth were now become difficult to refute; rather should we recognise the fulness of the supreme life, and its points of contact with all

lives, which are but portions of its vast completeness. Who does not feel that in the world's greatest events a certain harmony and correspondence are as charming as they are in music? There is a sort of counterpoint in history. And to this answering of deep unto deep, this responsiveness of the story of Jesus to all history, our attention is silently beckoned by St. Matthew, when, without asserting any closer link between the incidents, he borrows this phrase so aptly.

A much deeper meaning underlies the profound expression which God now commands Moses to employ, and although it must await consideration at a future time, the progressive education of Moses himself is meantime to be observed. At first he is taught that the Lord is the God of their fathers, in whose descendants He is therefore interested. Then the present Israel is His people, and valued for its own sake. Now he hears, and is bidden to repeat to Pharaoh, the amazing phrase, "Israel is My son, even My firstborn: let My son go that he may serve Me; and if thou refuse to let him go, behold I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn." Thus it is that infant faith is led from height to height. And assuredly there never was an utterance better fitted than this to prepare human minds, in the fulness of time, for a still clearer revelation of the nearness of God to man, and for the possibility of an absolute union between the Creator and His creature.

It was on his way into Egypt, with his wife and children, that a mysterious interposition forced Zipporah reluctantly and tardily to circumcise her son.

The meaning of this strange episode lies perhaps below the surface, but very near it. Danger in some form, probably that of sickness, pressed Moses hard, and

he recognised in it the displeasure of his God. The form of the narrative leads us to suppose that he had no previous consciousness of guilt, and had now to infer the nature of his offence without any explicit announcement, just as we infer it from what follows.

If so, he discerned his transgression when trouble awoke his conscience; and so did his wife Zipporah. Yet her resistance to the circumcision of their younger son was so tenacious, with such difficulty was it overcome by her husband's peril or by his command, that her tardy performance of the rite was accompanied by an insulting action and a bitter taunt. As she submitted, the Lord "let him go"; but we may perhaps conclude that the grievance continued to rankle, from the repetition of her gibe, "So she said, A bridegroom of blood art thou because of the circumcision." The words mean, "We are betrothed again in blood," and might of themselves admit a gentler, and even a tender significance; as if, in the sacrifice of a strong prejudice for her husband's sake, she felt a revival of "the kindness of her youth, the love of her espousals." For nothing removes the film from the surface of a true affection, and makes the heart aware how bright it is, so well as a great sacrifice, frankly offered for the sake of love.

But such a rendering is excluded by the action which went with her words, and they must be explained as meaning, This is the kind of husband I have wedded: these are our espousals. With such an utterance she fades almost entirely out of the story: it does not even tell how she drew back to her father; and thenceforth all we know of her is that she rejoined Moses only when the fame of his victory over Amalek had gone abroad.

Their union seems to have been an ill-assorted or at

least an unprosperous one. In the tender hour when their firstborn was to be named, the bitter sense of loneliness had continued to be nearer to the heart of Moses than the glad new consciousness of paternity, and he said, "I am a stranger in a strange land." Different indeed had been the experience of Joseph, who called his "firstborn Manasseh, for God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house" (Gen. xli. 51). The home-life of Moses had not made him forget that he was an exile. Even the removal of imminent death from her husband could not hush these selfish complaints of Zipporah, not because he was a father of blood to her little one, but because he was a bridegroom of blood to her own snrinking sensibilities. It is Miriam the sister, not Zipporah the wife, who gives lyrical and passionate voice to his triumph, and is mourned by the nation when she dies. Both what we read of her and what we do not read goes far to explain the insignificance of their children in history, and the more startling fact that the grandson of Moses became the venal instrument of the Danites in their schismatic worship (Judges xviii. 30, R.V.).

Domestic unhappiness is a palliation, but not a justification, for an unserviceable life. It is a great advantage to come into action with the dew and freshness of affection upon the soul. Yet it is not once nor twice that men have carried the message of God back from the barren desert and the lonely ways of their unhappiness to the not too happy race of man.

Now, who can fail to discern real history in all this? Is it in such a way that myth or legend would have dealt with the wife of the great deliverer? Still less conceivable is it that these should have treated Moses himself as the narrative hitherto has consistently done.

At every step he is made to stumble. His first attempt was homicidal, and brought upon him forty years of exile. When the Divine commission came he drew back wilfully, as he had formerly pressed forward unsent. There is not even any suggestion offered us of Stephen's apology for his violent deed—namely, that he supposed his brethren understood how that God by his hand was giving them deliverance (Acts vii. 25). There is nothing that resembles the eulogium of the Epistle to the Hebrews upon the faith which glorified his precipitancy, like the rainbow in a torrent, because that rash blow committed him to share the affliction of the people of God, and renounced the rank of a grandson of the Pharaoh (Heb. xi. 24-5). All this is very natural, if Moses himself be in any degree responsible for the narrative. It is incredible, if the narrative were put together after the Captivity, to claim the sanction of so great a name for a newly forged hierarchical system. Such a theory could scarcely be refuted more completely, if the narrative before us were invented with the deliberate aim to overthrow it.

But in truth the failures of the good and great are written for our admonition, teaching us how inconsistent are even the best of mortals, and how weak the most resolute. Rather than forfeit his own place among the chosen people, Moses had forsaken a palace and become a proscribed fugitive; yet he had neglected to claim for his child its rightful share in the covenant, its recognition among the sons of Abraham. Perhaps procrastination, perhaps domestic opposition, more potent than a king's wrath to shake his purpose, perhaps the insidious notion that one who had sacrificed so much might be at ease about slight negligences,—some such influence had left the commandment un-

observed. And now, when the dream of his life was being realised at last, and he found himself the chosen instrument of God for the rebuke of one nation and the making of another, how pardonable it must have seemed to leave an unpleasant small domestic duty over until a more convenient season! How natural it still seems to merge the petty task in the high vocation, to excuse small lapses in pursuit of lofty aims! But this was the very time when God, hitherto forbearing, took him sternly to task for his neglect, because men who are especially honoured should be more obedient and reverential than their fellows. Let young men who dream of a vast career, and meanwhile indulge themselves in small obliquities, let all who cast out demons in the name of Christ, and yet work iniquity, reflect upon this chosen and long-trained, self-sacrificing and ardent servant of the Lord, whom Jehovah seeks to kill because he wilfully disobeys even a purely ceremonial precept.

Moses was not only religious, but "a man of destiny," one upon whom vast interests depended. Now, such men have often reckoned themselves exempt from the ordinary laws of conduct.*

It is not a light thing, therefore, to find God's indignant protest against the faintest shadow of a doctrine so insidious and so deadly, set in the forefront of sacred history, at the very point where national concerns and those of religion begin to touch. If our politics are to be kept pure and clean, we must learn to exact a higher fidelity, and not a relaxed morality, from those who propose to sway the destinies of nations.

* "I am not an ordinary man," Napoleon used to say, "and the laws of morals and of custom were never made for me."—*Memoirs of Madame de Rémusat*, i. 91.

And now the brothers meet, embrace, and exchange confidences. As Andrew, the first disciple who brought another to Jesus, found first his own brother Simon, so was Aaron the earliest convert to the mission of Moses. And that happened which so often puts our faithlessness to shame. It had seemed very hard to break his strange tidings to the people: it was in fact very easy to address one whose love had not grown cold during their severance, who probably retained faith in the Divine purpose for which the beautiful child of the family had been so strangely preserved, and who had passed through trial and discipline unknown to us in the stern intervening years.

And when they told their marvellous story to the elders of the people, and displayed the signs, they believed; and when they heard that God had visited them in their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

This was their preparation for the wonders that should follow: it resembled Christ's appeal, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" or Peter's word to the impotent man, "Look on us."

For the moment the announcement had the desired effect, although too soon the early promise was succeeded by faithlessness and discontent. In this, again, the teaching of the earliest political movement on record is as fresh as if it were a tale of yesterday. The offer of emancipation stirs all hearts; the romance of liberty is beautiful beside the Nile as in the streets of Paris; but the cost has to be gradually learned; the losses displace the gains in the popular attention; the labour, the self-denial and the self-control grow wearisome, and Israel murmurs for the flesh-pots of Egypt, much as the modern revolution reverts to a

despotism. It is one thing to admire abstract freedom, but a very different thing to accept the austere conditions of the life of genuine freemen. And surely the same is true of the soul. The gospel gladdens the young convert: he bows his head and worships; but he little dreams of his long discipline, as in the forty desert years, of the solitary places through which his soul must wander, the drought, the Amalekite, the absent leader, and the temptations of the flesh. In mercy, the long future is concealed; it is enough that, like the apostles, we should consent to follow; gradually we shall obtain the courage to which the task may be revealed.

CHAPTER V.

PHARAOH REFUSES.

v. 1-23.

AFTER forty years of obscurity and silence, Moses re-enters the magnificent halls where he had formerly turned his back upon so great a place. The rod of a shepherd is in his hand, and a lowly Hebrew by his side. Men who recognise him shake their heads, and pity or despise the fanatic who had thrown away the most dazzling prospects for a dream. But he has long since made his choice, and whatever misgivings now beset him have regard to his success with Pharaoh or with his brethren, not to the wisdom of his decision.

Nor had he reason to repent of it. The pomp of an obsequious court was a poor thing in the eyes of an ambassador of God, who entered the palace to speak such lofty words as never passed the lips of any son of Pharaoh's daughter. He was presently to become a god unto Pharaoh, with Aaron for his prophet.

In itself, his presence there was formidable. The Hebrews had been feared when he was an infant. Now their cause was espoused by a man of culture, who had allied himself with their natural leaders, and was returned, with the deep and steady fire of a zeal which forty years of silence could not quench, to assert the rights of Israel as an independent people.

There is a terrible power in strong convictions, especially when supported by the sanctions of religion. Luther on one side, Loyola on the other, were mightier than kings when armed with this tremendous weapon. Yet there are forces upon which patriotism and fanaticism together break in vain. Tyranny and pride of race have also strong impelling ardours, and carry men far. Pharaoh is in earnest as well as Moses, and can act with perilous energy. And this great narrative begins the story of a nation's emancipation with a human demand, boldly made, but defeated by the pride and vigour of a startled tyrant and the tameness of a downtrodden people. The limitations of human energy are clearly exhibited before the direct interference of God begins. All that a brave man can do, when nerved by lifelong aspiration and by a sudden conviction that the hour of destiny has struck, and therefore upon which rationalism can draw, to explain the uprising of Israel, is exhibited in this preliminary attempt, this first demand of Moses.

Menephtah was no doubt the new Pharaoh whom the brothers accosted so boldly. What we glean of him elsewhere is highly suggestive of some grave event left unrecorded, exhibiting to us a man of uncontrollable temper yet of broken courage, a ruthless, godless, daunted man. There is a legend that he once hurled his spear at the Nile when its floods rose too high, and was punished with ten years of blindness. In the Libyan war, after fixing a time when he should join his vanguard, with the main army, a celestial vision forbade him to keep his word in person, and the victory was gained by his lieutenants. In another war, he boasts of having slaughtered the people and set fire to them, and netted the entire country as men

net birds. Forty years then elapse without war and without any great buildings; there are seditions and internal troubles, and the dynasty closes with his son.* All this is exactly what we should expect, if a series of tremendous blows had depopulated a country, abolished an army, and removed two millions of the working classes in one mass.

But it will be understood that this identification, concerning which there is now a very general consent of competent authorities, implies that the Pharaoh was not himself engulfed with his army. Nothing is on the other side except a poetic assertion in Psalm cxxxvi. 15, which is not that God destroyed, but that He "shook off" Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, because His mercy endureth for ever.

To this king, then, whose audacious family had usurped the symbols of deity for its head-dress, and whose father boasted that in battle "he became like the god Mentu" and "was as Baal," the brothers came as yet without miracle, with no credentials except from slaves, and said, "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness." The issue was distinctly raised: did Israel belong to Jehovah or to the king? And Pharaoh answered, with equal decision, "Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto His voice? I know not Jehovah, and what is more, I will not let Israel go."

Now, the ignorance of the king concerning Jehovah was almost or quite blameless: the fault was in his practical refusal to inquire. Jehovah was no concern of his: without waiting for information, he at once decided

* Robinson, "The Pharaohs of the Bondage."

that his grasp on his captives should not relax. And his second fault, which led to this, was the same grinding oppression of the helpless which for eighty years already had brought upon his nation the guilt of blood. Crowned and national cupidity, the resolution to wring from their slaves the last effort consistent with existence, such greed as took offence at even the momentary pause of hope while Moses pleaded, because "the people of the land are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens,"—these shut their hearts against reason and religion, and therefore God presently hardened those same hearts against natural misgiving and dread and awe-stricken submission to His judgments.

For it was against religion also that he was unyielding. In his ample Pantheon there was room at least for the possibility of the entrance of the Hebrew God, and in refusing to the subject people, without investigation, leisure for any worship, the king outraged not only humanity, but Heaven.

The brothers proceed to declare that they have themselves met with the deity, and there must have been many in the court who could attest at least the sincerity of Moses; they ask for liberty to spend a day in journeying outward and another in returning, with a day between for their worship, and warn the king of the much greater loss to himself which may be involved in vengeance upon refusal, either by war or pestilence. But the contemptuous answer utterly ignores religion: "Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, loose the people from their work? Get ye unto your burdens."

And his counter-measures are taken without loss of time: "that same day" the order goes out to exact the regular quantity of brick, but supply no straw for bind-

ing it together. It is a pitiless mandate, and illustrates the fact, very natural though often forgotten, that men as a rule cannot lose sight of the religious value of their fellow-men, and continue to respect or pity them as before. We do not deny that men who professed religion have perpetrated nameless cruelties, nor that unbelievers have been humane, sometimes with a pathetic energy, a tenacious grasp on the virtue still possible to those who have no Heaven to serve. But it is plain that the average man will despise his brother, and his brother's rights, just in proportion as the Divine sanctions of those rights fade away, and nothing remains to be respected but the culture, power and affluence which the victim lacks. "I know not Israel's God" is a sure prelude to the refusal to let Israel go, and even to the cruelty which beats the slave who fails to render impossible obedience.

"They be idle, therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God." And still there are men who hold the same opinion, that time spent in devotion is wasted, as regards the duties of real life. In truth, religion means freshness, elasticity and hope: a man will be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, if he serves the Lord. But perhaps immortal hope, and the knowledge that there is One Who shall break all prison bars and let the oppressed go free, are not the best narcotics to drug down the soul of a man into the monotonous tameness of a slave.

In the tenth verse we read that the Egyptian taskmasters and the officers combined to urge the people to their aggravated labours. And by the fourteenth verse we find that the latter officials were Hebrew officers whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them.

So that we have here one of the surest and worst

effects of slavery—namely, the demoralisation of the oppressed, the readiness of average men, who can obtain for themselves a little relief, to do so at their brethren's cost. These officials were scribes, "writers": their business was to register the amount of labour due, and actually rendered. These were doubtless the more comfortable class, of whom we read afterwards that they possessed property, for their cattle escaped the murrain and their trees the hail. And they had the means of acquiring quite sufficient skill to justify whatever is recorded of the works done in the construction of the tabernacle. The time is long past when scepticism found support for its incredulity in these details.

One advantage of the last sharp agony of persecution was that it finally detached this official class from the Egyptian interest, and welded Israel into a homogeneous people, with officers already provided. For, when the supply of bricks came short, these officials were beaten, and, as if no cause of the failure were palpable, they were asked, with a malicious chuckle, "Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task both yesterday and to-day, as heretofore?" And when they explain to Pharaoh, in words already expressive of their alienation, that the fault is with "thine own people," they are repulsed with insult, and made to feel themselves in evil case. For indeed they needed to be chastised for their forgetfulness of God. How soon would their hearts have turned back, how much more bitter yet would have been their complaints in the desert, if it were not for this last experience! But if judgment began with them, what should presently be the fate of their oppressors?

Their broken spirit shows itself by murmuring, not

against Pharaoh, but against Moses and Aaron, who at least had striven to help them. Here, as in the whole story, there is not a trace of either the lofty spirit which could have evolved the Mosaic law, or the hero-worship of a later age.

It is written that Moses, hearing their reproaches, "returned unto the Lord," although no visible shrine, no consecrated place of worship, can be thought of.

What is involved is the consecration which the heart bestows upon any place of privacy and prayer, where, in shutting out the world, the soul is aware of the special nearness of its King. In one sense we never leave Him, never return to Him. In another sense, by direct address of the attention and the will, we enter into His presence; we find Him in the midst of us, Who is everywhere. And all ceremonial consecrations do their office by helping us to realise and act upon the presence of Him in Whom, even when He is forgotten, we live and move and have our being. Therefore in the deepest sense each man consecrates or desecrates for himself his own place of prayer. There is a city where the Divine presence saturates every consciousness with rapture. And the seer beheld no temple therein, for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple of it.

Startling to our notions of reverence are the words in which Moses addresses God. "Lord, why hast Thou evil entreated this people? Why is it that Thou hast sent me? for since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath evil entreated this people; neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all." It is almost as if his faith had utterly given way, like that of the Psalmist when he saw the wicked in great prosperity, while waters of a full cup were

wrung out by the people of God (Ps. lxxiii. 3, 10). And there is always a dangerous moment when the first glow of enthusiasm burns down, and we realise how long the process, how bitter the disappointments, by which even a scanty measure of success must be obtained. Yet God had expressly warned Moses that Pharaoh would not release them until Egypt had been smitten with all His plagues. But the warning passed unapprehended, as we let many a truth pass, intellectually accepted it is true, but only as a theorem, a vague and abstract formula. As we know that we must die, that worldly pleasures are brief and unreal, and that sin draws evil in its train, yet wonder when these phrases become solid and practical in our experience, so, in the first flush and wonder of the promised emancipation, Moses had forgotten the predicted interval of trial.

His words would have been profane and irreverent indeed but for one redeeming quality. They were addressed to God Himself. Whenever the people murmured, Moses turned for help to Him Who reckons the most unconventional and daring appeal to Him far better than the most ceremonious phrases in which men cover their unbelief: "Lord, wherefore hast Thou evil entreated this people?" is in reality a much more pious utterance than "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." Wherefore Moses receives large encouragement, although no formal answer is vouchsafed to his daring question.

Even so, in our dangers, our torturing illnesses, and many a crisis which breaks through all the crust of forms and conventionalities, God may perhaps recognise a true appeal to Him, in words which only scandalise the orthodoxy of the formal and precise. In the bold

rejoinder of the Syro-Phœnician woman He recognised great faith. His disciples would simply have sent her away as clamorous.

Moses had again failed, even though Divinely commissioned, in the work of emancipating Israel, and thereupon he had cried to the Lord Himself to undertake the work. This abortive attempt, however, was far from useless: it taught humility and patience to the leader, and it pressed the nation together, as in a vice, by the weight of a common burden, now become intolerable. At the same moment, the iniquity of the tyrant was filled up.

But the Lord did not explain this, in answer to the remonstrance of Moses. Many things happen, for which no distinct verbal explanation is possible, many things of which the deep spiritual fitness cannot be expressed in words. Experience is the true commentator upon Providence, if only because the slow building of character is more to God than either the hasting forward of deliverance or the clearing away of intellectual mists. And it is only as we take His yoke upon us that we truly learn of Him. Yet much is implied, if not spoken out, in the words, "Now (because the time is ripe) shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh (I, because others have failed); for by a strong hand shall he let them go, and by a strong hand shall he drive them out of the land." It is under the weight of the "strong hand" of God Himself that the tyrant must either bend or break.

Similar to this is the explanation of many delays in answering our prayer, of the strange raising up of tyrants and demagogues, and of much else that perplexes Christians in history and in their own experience. These events develop human character,

for good or evil. And they give scope for the revealing of the fulness of the power which rescues. We have no means of measuring the supernatural force which overcomes but by the amount of the resistance offered. And if all good things came to us easily and at once we should not become aware of the horrible pit, our rescue from which demands gratitude. The Israelites would not have sung a hymn of such fervent gratitude when the sea was crossed, if they had not known the weight of slavery and the anguish of suspense. And in heaven the redeemed who have come out of great tribulation sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb.

Fresh air, a balmy wind, a bright blue sky—which of us feels a thrill of conscious exultation for these cheap delights? The released prisoner, the restored invalid, feels it:

> "The common earth, the air, the skies,
> To him are opening paradise."

Even so should Israel be taught to value deliverance. And now the process could begin.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF MOSES.

vi. 1-30.

WE have seen that the name Jehovah expresses not a philosophic meditation, but the most bracing and reassuring truth—viz., that an immutable and independent Being sustains His people; and this great title is therefore reaffirmed with emphasis in the hour of mortal discouragement. It is added that their fathers knew God by the name of God Almighty, but by His name Jehovah was He not known, or made known, unto them. Now, it is quite clear that they were not utterly ignorant of this title, for no such theory as that it was hitherto mentioned by anticipation only, can explain the first syllable in the name of the mother of Moses himself, nor the assertion that in the time of Seth men began to call upon the name of Jehovah (Gen. iv. 26), nor the name of the hill of Abraham's sacrifice, Jehovah-jireh (Gen. xxii. 14). Yet the statement cannot be made available for the purposes of any reasonable and moderate scepticism, since the sceptical theory demands a belief in successive redactions of the work in which an error so gross could not have escaped detection.

And the true explanation is that this Name was now, for the first time, to be realised as a sustaining power. The patriarchs had known the name; how its fitness

should be realised: God should be known by it. They had drawn support and comfort from that simpler view of the Divine protection which said, "I am the Almighty God: walk before Me and be thou perfect" (Gen. xvii. 1). But thenceforth all the experience of the past was to reinforce the energies of the present, and men were to remember that their promises came from One who cannot change. Others, like Abraham, had been stronger in faith than Moses. But faith is not the same as insight, and Moses was the greatest of the prophets (Deut. xxxiv. 10). To him, therefore, it was given to confirm the courage of his nation by this exalting thought of God. And the Lord proceeds to state what His promises to the patriarchs were, and joins together (as we should do) the assurance of His compassionate heart and of His inviolable pledges: "I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, . . and I have remembered My covenant."

It has been the same, in turn, with every new revelation of the Divine. The new was implicit in the old, but when enforced, unfolded, reapplied, men found it charged with unsuspected meaning and power, and as full of vitality and development as a handful of dry seeds when thrown into congenial soil. So it was pre-eminently with the doctrine of the Messiah. It will be the same hereafter with the doctrine of the kingdom of peace and the reign of the saints on earth. Some day men will smile at our crude theories and ignorant controversies about the Millennium. We, meantime, possess the saving knowledge of Christ amid many perplexities and obscurities. And so the patriarchs, who knew God Almighty, but not by His name Jehovah, were not lost for want of the knowledge of His name, but saved by faith in Him, in the living Being to

Whom all these names belong, and Who shall yet write upon the brows of His people some new name, hitherto undreamed by the ripest of the saints and the purest of the Churches. Meantime, let us learn the lessons of tolerance for other men's ignorance, remembering the ignorance of the father of the faithful, tolerance for difference of views, remembering how the unusual and rare name of God was really the precursor of a brighter revelation, and yet again, when our hearts are faint with longing for new light, and weary to death of the babbling of old words, let us learn a sober and cautious reconsideration, lest perhaps the very truth needed for altered circumstance and changing problem may lie, unheeded and dormant, among the dusty old phrases from which we turn away despairingly. Moreover, since the fathers knew the name Jehovah, yet gained from it no special knowledge of God, such as they had from His Almightiness, we are taught that discernment is often more at fault than revelation. To the quick perception and plastic imagination of the artist, our world reveals what the boor will never see. And the saint finds, in the homely and familiar words of Scripture, revelations for His soul that are unknown to common men. Receptivity is what we need far more than revelation.

Again is Moses bidden to appeal to the faith of his countrymen, by a solemn repetition of the Divine promise. If the tyranny is great, they shall be redeemed with a stretched out arm, that is to say, with a palpable interposition of the power of God, "and with great judgments." It is the first appearance in Scripture of this phrase, afterwards so common. Not mere vengeance upon enemies or vindication of subjects is in question: the thought is that of a deliberate weighing

of merits, and rendering out of measured penalties. Now, the Egyptian mythology had a very clear and solemn view of judgment after death. If king and people had grown cruel, it was because they failed to realise remote punishments, and did not believe in present judgments, here, in this life. But there is a God that judgeth in the earth. Not always, for mercy rejoiceth over judgment. We may still pray, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servants, O Lord, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." But when men resist warnings, then retribution begins even here. Sometimes it comes in plague and overthrow, sometimes in the worse form of a heart made fat, the decay of sensibilities abused, the dying out of spiritual faculty. Pharaoh was to experience both, the hardening of his heart and the ruin of his fortunes.

It is added, "I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you for a God." This is the language, not of a mere purpose, a will that has resolved to vindicate the right, but of affection. God is about to adopt Israel to Himself, and the same favour which belonged to rare individuals in the old time is now offered to a whole nation. Just as the heart of each man is gradually educated, learning first to love a parent and a family, and so led on to national patriotism, and at last to a world-wide philanthropy, so was the religious conscience of mankind awakened to believe that Abraham might be the friend of God, and then that His oath might be confirmed unto the children, and then that He could take Israel to Himself for a people, and at last that God loved the world.

It is not religion to think that God condescends merely to save us. He cares for us. He takes us to Himself. He gives Himself away to us, in return, to be our God.

Such a revelation ought to have been more to Israel than any pledge of certain specified advantages. It was meant to be a silken tie, a golden clasp, to draw together the almighty Heart and the hearts of these downtrodden slaves. Something within Him desires their little human love; they shall be to Him for a people. So He said again, "My son, give Me thine heart." And so, when He carried to the uttermost these unsought, unhoped for, and, alas! unwelcomed overtures of condescension, and came among us, He would have gathered, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, those who would not. It is not man who conceives, from definite services received, the wild hope of some spark of real affection in the bosom of the Eternal and Mysterious One. It is not man, amid the lavish joys and splendours of creation, who conceives the notion of a supreme Heart, as the explanation of the universe. It is God Himself Who says, "I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God."

Nor is it human conversion that begins the process, but a Divine covenant and pledge, by which God would fain convert us to Himself; even as the first disciples did not accost Jesus, but He turned and spoke to them the first question and the first invitation: "What seek ye? . . . Come, and ye shall see."

To-day, the choice of the civilised world has to be made between a mechanical universe and a revealed love, for no third possibility survives.

This promise establishes a relationship, which God never afterwards cancelled. Human unbelief rejected its benefits, and chilled the mutual sympathies which it involved; but the fact always remained, and in their darkest hour they could appeal to God to remember His covenant and the oath which He sware.

And this same assurance belongs to us. We are not to become good, or desirous of goodness, in order that God may requite with affection our virtues or our wistfulness. Rather we are to arise and come to our Father, and to call Him Father, although we are not worthy to be called His sons. We are to remember how Jesus said, "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!" and to learn that He is the Father of those who are evil, and even of those who are still unpardoned, as He said again, "If ye forgive not . . . neither will your heavenly Father forgive you."

Much controversy about the universal Fatherhood of God would be assuaged if men reflected upon the significant distinction which our Saviour drew between His Fatherhood and our sonship, the one always a reality of the Divine affection, the other only a possibility, for human enjoyment or rejection: "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be sons of your Father Which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 45). There is no encouragement to presumption in the assertion of the Divine Fatherhood upon such terms. For it speaks of a love which is real and deep without being feeble and indiscriminate. It appeals to faith because there is an absolute fact to lean upon, and to energy because privilege is conditional. It reminds us that our relationship is like that of the ancient Israel,—that we are in a covenant, as they were, but that the carcases of many of them fell in the wilderness; although God had taken them for a people, and was to them a God, and said, "Israel is My son, even My firstborn."

It is added that faith shall develop into knowledge. Moses is to assure them now that they "shall know"

hereafter that the Lord is Jehovah their God. And this, too, is a universal law, that we shall know if we follow on to know: that the trial of our faith worketh patience, and patience experience, and we have so dim and vague an apprehension of Divine realities, chiefly because we have made but little trial, and have not tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious.

In this respect, as in so many more, religion is analogous with nature. The squalor of the savage could be civilised, and the distorted and absurd conceptions of mediæval science could be corrected, only by experiment, persistently and wisely carried out.

And it is so in religion: its true evidence is unknown to those who never bore its yoke; it is open to just such raillery and rejection as they who will not love can pour upon domestic affection and the sacred ties of family life; but, like these, it vindicates itself, in the rest of their souls, to those who will take the yoke and learn. And its best wisdom is not of the cunning brain but of the open heart, that wisdom from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated.

And thus, while God leads Israel, they shall know that He is Jehovah, and true to His highest revelations of Himself.

All this they heard, and also, to define their hope and brighten it, the promise of Palestine was repeated; but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage. Thus the body often holds the spirit down, and kindly allowance is made by Him Who knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust, and Who, in the hour of His own agony, found the excuse for His unsympathising followers that the spirit was willing although the flesh was weak. So

when Elijah made request for himself that he might die, in the utter reaction which followed his triumph on Carmel and his wild race to Jezreel, the good Physician did not dazzle him with new splendours of revelation until after he had slept, and eaten miraculous food, and a second time slept and eaten.

But if the anguish of the body excuses much weakness of the spirit, it follows, on the other hand, that men are responsible to God for that heavy weight which is laid upon the spirit by pampered and luxurious bodies, incapable of self-sacrifice, rebellious against the lightest of His demands. It is suggestive, that Moses, when sent again to Pharaoh, objected, as at first: "Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?"

Every new hope, every great inspiration which calls the heroes of God to a fresh attack upon the powers of Satan, is checked and hindered more by the coldness of the Church than by the hostility of the world. That hostility is expected, and can be defied. But the infidelity of the faithful is appalling indeed.

We read with wonder the great things which Christ has promised to believing prayer, and, at the same time, although we know painfully that we have never claimed and dare not claim these promises, we wonder equally at the foreboding question, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find the faith (faith in its fulness) on the earth?" (Luke xviii. 8). But we ought to remember that our own low standard helps to form the standard of attainment for the Church at large—that when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it—that many a large sacrifice would be readily made for Christ, at this hour, if only ease and pleasure

were at stake, which is refused because it is too hard to be called well-meaning enthusiasts by those who ought to glorify God in such attainment, as the first brethren did in the zeal and the gifts of Paul.

The vast mountains raise their heads above mountain ranges which encompass them; and it is not when the level of the whole Church is low, that giants of faith and of attainment may be hoped for. Nay, Christ stipulates for the agreement of two or three, to kindle and make effectual the prayers which shall avail.

For the purification of our cities, for the shaming of our legislation until it fears God as much as a vested interest, for the reunion of those who worship the same Lord, for the conversion of the world, and first of all for the conversion of the Church, heroic forces are demanded. But all the tendency of our half-hearted, abject, semi-Christianity is to repress everything that is unconventional, abnormal, likely to embroil us with our natural enemy, the world; and who can doubt that, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, we shall know of many an aspiring soul, in which the sacred fire had begun to burn, which sank back into lethargy and the commonplace, murmuring in its despair, "Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me?"

It was the last fear which ever shook the great heart of the emancipator Moses.

At the beginning of the grand historical work, of which all this has been the prelude, there is set the pedigree of Moses and Aaron, according to "the heads of their fathers' houses,"—an epithet which indicates a subdivision of the "family," as the family is a subdivision of the tribe. Of the sons of Jacob, Reuben

and Simeon are mentioned, to put Levi in his natural third place. And from Levi to Moses only four generations are mentioned, favouring somewhat the briefer scheme of chronology which makes four centuries cover all the time from Abraham, and not the captivity alone. But it is certain that this is a mere recapitulation of the more important links in the genealogy. In Num. xxvi. 58, 59, six generations are reckoned instead of four; in 1 Chron. ii. 3 there are seven generations; and elsewhere in the same book (vi. 22) there are ten. It is well known that similar omissions of obscure or unworthy links occur in St. Matthew's pedigree of our Lord, although some stress is there laid upon the recurrent division into fourteens. And it is absurd to found any argument against the trustworthiness of the narrative upon a phenomenon so frequent, and so sure to be avoided by a forger, or to be corrected by an unscrupulous editor. In point of fact, nothing is less likely to have occurred, if the narrative were a late invention.

Neither, in that case, would the birth of the great emancipator be ascribed to the union of Amram with his father's sister, for such marriages were distinctly forbidden by the law (Lev. xviii. 14).

Nor would the names of the children of the founder of the nation be omitted, while those of Aaron are recorded, unless we were dealing with genuine history, which knows that the sons of Aaron inherited the lawful priesthood, while the descendants of Moses were the jealous founders of a mischievous schism (Judges xviii. 30, R.V.).

Nor again, if this were a religious romance, designed to animate the nation in its later struggles, should we read of the hesitation and the fears of a leader "of

uncircumcised lips," instead of the trumpet-like calls to action of a noble champion.

Nor does the broken-spirited meanness of Israel at all resemble the conception, popular in every nation, of a virtuous and heroic antiquity, a golden age. It is indeed impossible to reconcile the motives and the date to which this narrative is ascribed by some, with the plain phenomena, with the narrative itself.

Nor is it easy to understand why the Lord, Who speaks of bringing out "My hosts, My people, the children of Israel" (vii. 4, etc.), should never in the Pentateuch be called the Lord of Hosts, if that title were in common use when it was written; for no epithet would better suit the song of Miriam or the poetry of the Fifth Book.

When Moses complained that he was of uncircumcised lips, the Lord announced that He had already made His servant as a god unto Pharaoh, having armed him, even then, with the terrors which are soon to shake the tyrant's soul.

It is suggestive and natural that his very education in a court should render him fastidious, less willing than a rougher man might have been to appear before the king after forty years of retirement, and feeling almost physically incapable of speaking what he felt so deeply, in words that would satisfy his own judgment. Yet God had endowed him, even then, with a supernatural power far greater than any facility of expression. In his weakness he would thus be made strong; and the less fit he was to assert for himself any ascendency over Pharaoh, the more signal would be the victory of his Lord, when he became "very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people" (xi. 3).

As a proof of this mastery he was from the first to speak to the haughty king through his brother, as a god through some prophet, being too great to reveal himself directly. It is a memorable phrase; and so lofty an assertion could never, in the myth of a later period, have been ascribed to an origin so lowly as the reluctance of Moses to expose his deficiency in elocution.

Therefore he should henceforth be emboldened by the assurance of qualification bestowed already: not only by the hope of help and achievement yet to come, but by the certainty of present endowment. And so should each of us, in his degree, be bold, who have gifts differing according to the grace given unto us.

It is certain that every living soul has at least one talent, and is bound to improve it. But how many of us remember that this loan implies a commission from God, as real as that of prophet and deliverer, and that nothing but our own default can prevent it from being, at the last, received again with usury?

The same bravery, the same confidence when standing where his Captain has planted him, should inspire the prophet, and him that giveth alms, and him that showeth mercy; for all are members in one body, and therefore animated by one invincible Spirit from above (Rom. xii. 4-9).

The endowment thus given to Moses made him "as a god" to Pharaoh.

We must not take this to mean only that he had a prophet or spokesman, or that he was made formidable, but that the peculiar nature of his prowess would be felt. It was not his own strength. The supernatural would become visible in him. He who boasted "I know not Jehovah" would come to crouch before Him

in His agent, and humble himself to the man whom once he contemptuously ordered back to his burdens, with the abject prayer, "Forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and entreat Jehovah your God that He may take away from me this death only."

Now, every consecrated power may bear witness to the Lord: it is possible to do all to the glory of God. Not that every separate action will be ascribed to a preternatural source, but the sum total of the effect produced by a holy life will be sacred. He who said, "I have made thee a god unto Pharaoh," says of all believers, "I in them, and Thou, Father, in Me, that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART.

vii. 3-13.

WHEN Moses received his commission, at the bush, words were spoken which are now repeated with more emphasis, and which have to be considered carefully. For probably no statement of Scripture has excited fiercer criticism, more exultation of enemies and perplexity of friends, than that the Lord said, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he shall not let the people go," and that in consequence of this Divine act Pharaoh sinned and suffered. Just because the words are startling, it is unjust to quote them without careful examination of the context, both in the prediction and the fulfilment. When all is weighed, compared, and harmonised, it will at last be possible to draw a just conclusion. And although it may happen long before then, that the objector will charge us with special pleading, yet he will be the special pleader himself, if he seeks to hurry us, by prejudice or passion, to give a verdict which is based upon less than all the evidence, patiently weighed.

Let us in the first place find out how soon this dreadful process began; when was it that God fulfilled His threat, and hardened, in any sense whatever, the heart of Pharaoh? Did He step in at the beginning,

and render the unhappy king incapable of weighing the remonstrances which He then performed the cruel mockery of addressing to him? Were these as insincere and futile as if one bade the avalanche to pause which his own act had started down the icy slopes? Was Pharaoh as little responsible for his pursuit of Israel as his horses were—being, like them, the blind agents of a superior force? We do not find it so. In the fifth chapter, when a demand is made, without any sustaining miracle, simply appealing to the conscience of the ruler, there is no mention of any such process, despite the insults with which Pharaoh then assails both the messengers and Jehovah Himself, Whom he knows not. In the seventh chapter there is clear evidence that the process is yet unaccomplished; for, speaking of an act still future, it declares, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt" (vii. 3). And this terrible act is not connected with the remonstrances and warnings of God, but entirely with the increasing pressure of the miracles.

The exact period is marked when the hand of doom closed upon the tyrant. It is not where the Authorised Version places it. When the magicians imitated the earlier signs of Moses, "his heart was strong," but the original does not bear out the assertion that at this time the Lord made it so by any judicial act of His (vii. 13). That only comes with the sixth plague; and the course of events may be traced, fairly well, by the help of the margin of the Revised Version.

After the plague of blood "Pharaoh's heart was strong" ("hardened"), and this is distinctly ascribed to his own action, because "he set his heart even to this" (vii. 22, 23).

After the second plague, it was still he himself who "made his heart heavy" (viii. 15).

After the third plague the magicians warned him that the very finger of some god was upon him indeed: their rivalry, which hitherto might have been somewhat of a palliation for his obstinacy, was now ended; but yet "his heart was strong" (viii. 19).

Again, after the fourth plague he "made his heart heavy"; and it "was heavy" after the fifth plague, (viii. 32, ix. 7).

Only thenceforward comes the judicial infatuation upon him who has resolutely infatuated himself hitherto.

But when five warnings and penalties have spent their force in vain, when personal agony is inflicted in the plague of boils, and the magicians in particular cannot stand before him through their pain, would it have been proof of virtuous contrition if he had yielded then? If he had needed evidence, it was given to him long before. Submission now would have meant prudence, not penitence; and it was against prudence, not penitence, that he was hardened. Because he had resisted evidence, experience, and even the testimony of his own magicians, he was therefore stiffened against the grudging and unworthy concessions which must otherwise have been wrested from him, as a wild beast will turn and fly from fire. He was henceforth himself to become an evidence and a portent; and so "The Lord made strong the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them" (ix. 12). It was an awful doom, but it is not open to the attacks so often made upon it. It only means that for him the last five plagues were not disciplinary, but wholly penal.

Nay, it stops short of asserting even this: they might still have appealed to his reason; they were only

not allowed to crush him by the agency of terror. Not once is it asserted that God hardened his heart against any nobler impulse than alarm, and desire to evade danger and death. We see clearly this meaning in the phrase, when it is applied to his army entering the Red Sea: "I will make strong the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall go in" (xiv. 17). It needed no greater moral turpitude to pursue the Hebrews over the sands than on the shore, but it certainly required more hardihood. But the unpursued departure which the good-will of Egypt refused, their common sense was not allowed to grant. Callousness was followed by infatuation, as even the pagans felt that whom God wills to ruin He first drives mad.

This explanation implies that to harden Pharaoh's heart was to inspire him, not with wickedness, but with nerve.

And as far as the original language helps us at all, it decidedly supports this view. Three different expressions have been unhappily rendered by the same English word, to harden; but they may be discriminated throughout the narrative in Exodus, by the margin of the Revised Version.

One word, which commonly appears without any marginal explanation, is the same which is employed elsewhere about "the cause which is too *hard* for" minor judges (Deut. i. 17, cf. xv. 18, etc.). Now, this word is found (vii. 13) in the second threat that "I will harden Pharaoh's heart," and in the account which was to be given to posterity of how "Pharaoh hardened himself to let us go" (xiii. 15). And it is said likewise of Sihon, king of Heshbon, that he "would not let us pass by him, for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit and made his heart strong" (Deut. ii. 30). But

since it does not occur anywhere in all the narrative of what God actually did with Pharaoh, it is only just to interpret this phrase in the prediction by what we read elsewhere of the manner of its fulfilment.

The second word is explained in the margin as meaning *to make strong*. Already God had employed it when He said "I will *make strong* his heart" (iv. 21), and this is the term used of the first fulfilment of the menace, after the sixth plague (ix. 12). God is not said to interfere again after the seventh, which had few special terrors for Pharaoh himself; but from henceforth the expression "to make *strong*" alternates with the phrase "to make *heavy*." "Go in unto Pharaoh, for I have made heavy his heart and the heart of his servants, that I might show these My signs in the midst of them" (x. 1).

It may be safely assumed that these two expressions cover between them all that is asserted of the judicial action of God in preventing a recoil of Pharaoh from his calamities. Now, the strengthening of a heart, however punitive and disastrous when a man's will is evil (just as the strengthening of his arm is disastrous then), has in itself no immorality inherent. It is a thing as often good as bad,—as when Israel and Joshua are exhorted to "Be *strong* and of a good courage" (Deut. xxxi. 6, 7, 23), and when the angel laid his hand upon Daniel and said, "Be strong, yea, be strong" (Dan. x. 19). In these passages the phrase is identical with that which describes the process by which Pharaoh was prevented from cowering under the tremendous blows he had provoked.

The other expression is to make heavy or dull. Thus "the eyes of Israel were *heavy* with age" (Gen. xlviii. 10), and as we speak of a *weight* of honour,

equally with the heaviness of a dull man, so we are twice commanded, "Make heavy (honour) thy father and thy mother"; and the Lord declares, "I will make Myself heavy (get Me honour) upon Pharaoh" (Deut. v. 16, Exod. xx. 12, xiv. 4, 17, 18). In these latter references it will be observed that the making "strong" the heart of Pharaoh, and the making "Myself heavy" are so connected as almost to show a design of indicating how far is either expression from conveying the notion of immorality, infused into a human heart by God. For one of the two phrases which have been thus interpreted is still applied to Pharaoh; but the other (and the more sinister, as we should think, when thus applied) is appropriated by God to Himself: He makes Himself heavy.

It is also a curious and significant coincidence that the same word was used of the burdens that were made *heavy* when first they claimed their freedom, which is now used of the treatment of the heart of their oppressor (v. 9).

It appears, then, that the Lord is never said to debauch Pharaoh's heart, but only to strengthen it against prudence and to make it dull; that the words used do not express the infusion of evil passion, but the animation of a resolute courage, and the overclouding of a natural discernment; and, above all, that every one of the three words, to make hard, to make strong, and to make heavy, is employed to express Pharaoh's own treatment of himself, before it is applied to any work of God, as actually taking place already.

Nevertheless, there is a solemn warning for all time, in the assertion that what he at first chose, the vengeance of God afterward chose for him. For indeed the same process, working more slowly but on identical

lines, is constantly seen in the hardening effect of vicious habit. The gambler did not mean to stake all his fortune upon one chance, when first he timidly laid down a paltry stake; nor has he changed his mind since then as to the imprudence of such a hazard. The drunkard, the murderer himself, is a man who at first did evil as far as he dared, and afterwards dared to do evil which he would once have shuddered at.

Let no man assume that prudence will always save him from ruinous excess, if respect for righteousness cannot withhold him from those first compliances which sap the will, destroy the restraint of self-respect, wear away the horror of great wickedness by familiarity with the same guilt in its lesser phases, and, above all, forfeit the enlightenment and calmness of judgment which come from the Holy Spirit of God, Who is the Spirit of wisdom and of counsel, and makes men to be of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.

Let no man think that the fear of damnation will bring him to the mercy-seat at last, if the burden and gloom of being "condemned already" cannot now bend his will. "Even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind" (Rom. i. 28). "I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. . . . I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments wherein they should not live" (Ezek. xx. 11, 25).

This is the inevitable law, the law of a confused and darkened judgment, a heart made heavy and ears shut, a conscience seared, an infatuated will kicking against the pricks, and heaping to itself wrath against the day of wrath. Wilful sin is always a challenge to God, and it is avenged by the obscuring of the lamp of God

in the soul. Now, a part of His guiding light is prudence; and it is possible that men who will not be warned by the fear of injury to their conscience, such as they suppose that Pharaoh suffered, may be sobered by the danger of such derangement of their intellectual efficiency as really befel him.

In this sense men are, at last, impelled blindly to their fate (and this is a judicial act of God, although it comes in the course of nature), but first they launch themselves upon the slope which grows steeper at every downward step, until arrest is impossible.

On the other hand, every act of obedience helps to release the will from its entanglement, and to clear the judgment which has grown dull, anointing the eyes with eye-salve that they may see. Not in vain is the assertion of the bondage of the sinner and the glorious liberty of the children of God.

A second time, then, Moses presented himself before Pharaoh with his demands; and, as he had been forewarned, he was now challenged to give a sign in proof of his commission from a god.

And the demand was treated as reasonable; a sign was given, and a menacing one. The peaceable rod of the shepherd, a fit symbol of the meek man who bore it, became a serpent* before the king, as Moses was to become destructive to his realm. But when the wise men of Egypt and the enchanters were called, they did likewise; and although a marvel was added

* It is true that the word means any large reptile, as when "God created great *whales*"; but doubtless our English version is correct. It was certainly a serpent which he had recently fled from, and then taken by the tail (iv. 4). And unless we suppose the magicians to have wrought a genuine miracle, no other creature can be suggested, equally convenient for their sleight of hand.

which incontestably declared the superior power of the Deity Whom Aaron represented, yet their rivalry sufficed to make strong the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not let the people go. The issue was now knit: the result would be more signal than if the quarrel were decided at one blow, and upon all the gods of Egypt the Lord would exercise vengeance.

What are we to think of the authentification of a religion by a sign? Beyond doubt, Jesus recognised this aspect of His own miracles, when He said, "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had sin" (John xv. 24). And yet there is reason in the objection that no amount of marvel ought to deflect by one hair's breadth our judgment of right and wrong, and the true appeal of a religion must be to our moral sense.

No miracle can prove that immoral teaching is sacred. But it can prove that it is supernatural. And this is precisely what Scripture always proclaims. In the New Testament, we are bidden to take heed, because a day will come, when false prophets shall work great signs and wonders, to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Mark xiii. 22). In the Old Testament, a prophet may seduce the people to worship other gods, by giving them a sign or a wonder which shall come to pass, but they must surely stone him: they must believe that his sign is only a temptation; and above whatever power enabled him to work it, they must recognise Jehovah proving them, and know that the supernatural has come to them in judgment, not in revelation (Deut. xiii. 1-5).

Now, this is the true function of the miraculous. At the most, it cannot coerce the conscience, but only challenge it to consider and to judge.

A teacher of the purest morality may be only a human teacher still; nor is the Christian bound to follow into the desert every clamorous innovator, or to seek in the secret chamber every one who whispers a private doctrine to a few. We are entitled to expect that one who is commissioned directly from above will bear special credentials with him; but when these are exhibited, we must still judge whether the document they attest is forged. And this may explain to us why the magicians were allowed for awhile to perplex the judgment of Pharaoh—whether by fraud, as we may well suppose, or by infernal help. It was enough that Moses should set his claims upon a level with those which Pharaoh reverenced: the king was then bound to weigh their relative merits in other and wholly different scales.

THE PLAGUES.

vii. 14.

There are many aspects in which the plagues of Egypt may be contemplated.

We may think of them as ranging through all nature, and asserting the mastery of the Lord alike over the river on which depended the prosperity of the realm, over the minute pests which can make life more wretched than larger and more conspicuous ills (the frogs of the water, the reptiles that disgrace humanity, and the insects that infest the air), over the bodies of animals stricken with murrain, and those of man tortured with boils, over hail in the cloud and blight in the crop, over the breeze that bears the locust and the sun that grows dark at noon, and at last over the secret springs of human life itself.

No pantheistic creed (and the Egyptian religion struck its roots deep into pantheistic speculation) could thus completely exalt God above nature, as a superior and controlling Power, not one with the mighty wheels of the universe, of which the height is terrible, but, as Ezekiel saw Him, enthroned above them in the likeness of fire, and yet in the likeness of humanity.

No idolatrous creed, however powerful be its conception of one god of the hills and another of the valleys, could thus represent a single deity as wielding all the arrows of adverse fortune, able to assail us from earth and sky and water, formidable alike in the least things and in the greatest. And presently the demonstration is completed, when at His bidding the tempest heaps up the sea, and at His frown the waters return to their strength again.

And no philosophic theory condescends to bring the Ideal, the Absolute, and the Unconditioned, into such close and intimate connection with the frog-spawn of the ditch and the blain upon the tortured skin.

We may, with ample warrant from Scripture, make the controversial application still more simple and direct, and think of the plagues as wreaking vengeance, for the worship they had usurped and the cruelties they had sanctioned, upon all the gods of Egypt, which are conceived of for the moment as realities, and as humbled, if not in fact, yet in the sympathies of priest and worshipper (xii. 12).

Then we shall see the domain of each impostor invaded, and every vaunted power to inflict evil or to remove it triumphantly wielded by Him Who proves His equal mastery over all, and thus we shall find here the justification of that still bolder personification which says, "Worship Him, all ye gods" (Psalm xcvii. 7).

The Nile had a sacred name, and was adored as "Hapee, or Hapee Mu, the Abyss, or the Abyss of Waters, or the Hidden," and the king was frequently portrayed standing between two images of this god, his throne wreathed with water-lilies. The second plague struck at the goddess HEKT, whose head was that of a frog. The uncleanness of the third plague deranged the whole system of Egyptian worship, with its punctilious and elaborate purifications. In every one there is either a presiding divinity attacked, or a blow dealt upon the priesthood or the sacrifice, or a sphere invaded which some deity should have protected, until the sun himself is darkened, the great god RA, to whom their sacred city was dedicated, and whose name is incorporated in the title of his earthly representative, the Pharaoh or PH-RA. Then at last, after all these premonitions, the deadly blow struck home.

Or we may think of the plagues as retributive, and then we shall discover a wonderful suitability in them all. It was a direful omen that the first should afflict the nation through the river, into which, eighty years before, the Hebrew babes had been cast to die, which now rolled bloody, and seemed to disclose its dead. It was fit that the luxurious homes of the oppressors should become squalid as the huts of the slaves they trampled; that their flesh should suffer torture worse than that of the whips they used so unmercifully; that the loss of crops and cattle should bring home to them the hardships of the poor who toiled for their magnificence; that physical darkness should appal them with vague terrors and undefined apprehensions, such as ever haunt the bosom of the oppressed, whose life is the sport of a caprice; and at last that the aged should learn by the deathbed of the prop and pride of their

declining feebleness, and the younger feel beside the cradle of the first blossom and fruit of love, all the agony of such bereavement as they had wantonly inflicted on the innocent.

And since the fear of disadvantage in war had prompted the murder of the Hebrew children, it was right that the retributive blow should destroy first their children and then their men of war.

When we come to examine the plagues in detail, we discover that it is no arbitrary fancy which divides them into three triplets, leading up to the appalling tenth. Thus the first, fourth, and seventh, each of which begins a triplet, are introduced by a command to Moses to warn Pharaoh "in the morning" (vii. 15), or "early in the morning" (viii. 20, ix. 13). The third, sixth and ninth, on the contrary, are inflicted without any warning whatever. The story of the third plague closes with the defeat of the magicians, the sixth with their inability to stand before the king, and the ninth with the final rupture, when Moses declares, "Thou shalt see my face no more" (viii. 19, ix. 11, x. 29).

The first three are plagues of loathsomeness—blood-stained waters, frogs and lice; the next three bring actual pain and loss with them—stinging flies, murrain which afflicts the beasts, and boils upon all the Egyptians; and the third triplet are "nature-plagues"—hail, locusts and darkness. It is only after the first three plagues that the immunity of Israel is mentioned; and after the next three, when the hail is threatened, instructions are first given by which those Egyptians who fear Jehovah may also obtain protection. Thus, in orderly and solemn procession, marched the avengers of God upon the guilty land.

It has been observed, concerning the miracles of

Jesus, that not one of them was creative, and that, whenever it was possible, He wrought by the use of material naturally provided. The waterpots should be filled; the five barley-loaves should be sought out, the nets should be let down for a draught; and the blind man should have his eyes anointed, and go wash in the Pool of Siloam.

And it is easily seen that such miracles were a more natural expression of His errand, which was to repair and purify the existing system of things, and to remove our moral disease and dearth, than any exercise of creative power would have been, however it might have dazzled the spectators.

Now, the same remark applies to the miracles of Moses, to the coming of God in judgment, as to His revelation of Himself in grace; and therefore we need not be surprised to hear that natural phenomena are not unknown which offer a sort of dim hint or foreshadowing of the terrible ten plagues. Either cryptogamic vegetation or the earth borne down from upper Africa is still seen to redden the river, usually dark, but not so as to destroy the fish. Frogs and vermin and stinging insects are the pest of modern travellers. Cattle plagues make ravage there, and hideous diseases of the skin are still as common as when the Lord promised to reward the obedience of Israel to sanitary law by putting upon them none of "the evil diseases of Egypt" which they knew (Deut. vii. 15).* The locust is still dreaded. But some of the other visitations were more direful because not only their

* To this day, amid squalid surroundings for which nominal Christians are responsible, the immunity of the Jewish race from such suffering is conspicuous, and at least a remarkable coincidence.

intensity but even their existence was almost unprecedented: hail in Egypt was only not quite unknown; and such veiling of the sun as occurs for a few minutes during the storms of sand in the desert ought scarcely to be quoted as even a suggestion of the prolonged horror of the ninth plague.

Now, this accords exactly with the moral effect which was to be produced. The rescued people were not to think of God as one who strikes down into nature from outside, with strange and unwonted powers, superseding utterly its familiar forces. They were to think of Him as the Author of all; and of the common troubles of mortality as being indeed the effects of sin, yet ever controlled and governed by Him, let loose at His will, and capable of mounting to unimagined heights if His restraints be removed from them. By the east wind He brought the locusts, and removed them by the south-west wind. By a storm He divided the sea. The common things of life are in His hands, often for tremendous results. And this is one of the chief lessons of the narrative for us. Let the mind range over the list of the nine which stop short of absolute destruction, and reflect upon the vital importance of immunities for which we are scarcely grateful.

The purity of water is now felt to be among the foremost necessities of life. It is one which asks nothing from us except to refrain from polluting what comes from heaven so limpid. And yet we are half satisfied to go on habitually inflicting on ourselves a plague more foul and noxious than any occasional turning of our rivers into blood. The two plagues which dealt with minute forms of life may well remind us of the vast part which we are now aware that the smallest organisms play in the economy of life, as the

agents of the Creator. Who gives thanks aright for the cheap blessing of the unstained light of heaven?

But we are insensible to the every-day teaching of this narrative: we turn our rivers into fluid poison; we spread all around us deleterious influences, which breed by minute forms of parasitical life the germs of cruel disease; we load the atmosphere with fumes which slay our cattle with periodical distempers, and are deadlier to vegetation than the hailstorm or the locust; we charge it with carbon so dense that multitudes have forgotten that the sky is blue, and on our Metropolis comes down at frequent intervals the darkness of the ninth plague, and all the time we fail to see that God, Who enacts and enforces every law of nature, does really plague us whenever these outraged laws avenge themselves. The miraculous use of nature in special emergencies is such as to show the Hand which regularly wields its powers.

At the same time there is no more excuse for the rationalism which would reduce the calamities of Egypt to a coincidence, than for explaining away the manna which fed a nation during its wanderings by the drug which is gathered, in scanty morsels, upon the acacia tree. The awful severity of the judgments, the series which they formed, their advent and removal at the menace and the prayer of Moses, are considerations which make such a theory absurd. The older scepticism, which supposed Moses to have taken advantage of some epidemic, to have learned in the wilderness the fords of the Red Sea,* to have discovered water, when

* But indeed this notion is not yet dead. "A high wind left the shallow sea so low that it became possible to ford it. Moses eagerly accepted the suggestion, and made the venture with success," etc.—*Wellhausen*, "Israel," in *Encyc. Brit.*

the caravan was perishing of thirst, by his knowledge of the habits of wild beasts, and finally to have dazzled the nation at Horeb with some kind of fireworks, is itself almost a miracle in its violation of the laws of mind. The concurrence of countless favourable accidents and strange resources of leadership is like the chance arrangement of a printer's type to make a poem.

There is a common notion that the ten plagues followed each other with breathless speed, and were completed within a few weeks. But nothing in the narrative asserts or even hints this, and what we do know is in the opposite direction. The seventh plague was wrought in February, for the barley was in the ear and the flax in blossom (ix. 31); and the feast of passover was kept on the fourteenth day of the month Abib, so that the destruction of the firstborn was in the middle of April, and there was an interval of about two months between the last four plagues. Now, the same interval throughout would bring back the first plague to September or October. But the natural discoloration of the river, mentioned above, is in the middle of the year, when the river begins to rise; and this, it may possibly be inferred, is the natural period at which to fix the first plague. They would then range over a period of about nine months. During the interval between them, the promises and treacheries of the king excited alternate hope and rage in Israel; the scribes of their own race (once the vassals of their tyrants, but already estranged by their own oppression) began to take rank as officers among the Jews, and to exhibit the rudimentary promise of national order and government; and the growing fears of their enemies fostered that triumphant sense of mastery, out of which

national hope and pride are born. When the time came for their departure, it was possible to transmit orders throughout all their tribes, and they came out of Egypt by their armies, which would have been utterly impossible a few months before. It was with them, as it is with every man that breathes: the delay of God's grace was itself a grace; and the slowly ripening fruit grew mellower than if it had been forced into a speedier maturity.

THE FIRST PLAGUE.

VII. 14-25.

It was perhaps when the Nile was rising, and Pharaoh was coming to the bank, in pomp of state, to make official observation of its progress, on which the welfare of the kingdom depended, and to do homage before its divinity, that the messenger of another Deity confronted him, with a formal declaration of war. It was a strange contrast. The wicked was in great prosperity, neither was he plagued like another man. Upon his head, if this were Menephtah, was the golden symbol of his own divinity. Around him was an obsequious court. And yet there was moving in his heart some unconfessed sense of awe, when confronted once more by the aged shepherd and his brother, who had claimed a commission from above, and had certainly met his challenge, and made a short end of the rival snakes of his own seers. Once he had asked "Who is Jehovah?" and had sent His ambassadors to their tasks again with insult. But now he needs to harden his heart, in order not to yield to their strange and persistent demands. He remembers how they had spoken to him already, "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is

discoloration lasts for three weeks, and mythical tendencies would rather exaggerate than shorten the term

Again, it is contended that only with the fourth plague did Israel begin to enjoy exemption, because then only is their immunity recorded.* But it is strange indeed to suppose that they were involved in punishments the design of which was their relief; and in fact their exemption is implied in the statement that the Egyptians (only) had to dig wells. It is to be understood that large stores of water would everywhere be laid up, because the Nile water, however delicious, carries much sediment which must be allowed to settle down. They would not be forced, therefore, to fall back upon the polluted common sources for a supply.

And now let us contrast this miracle with the first of the New Testament. One spoiled the happiness of the guilty; the other rescued the overclouded joy of the friends of Jesus, not turning water into blood but into wine; declaring at one stroke all the difference between the law which worketh wrath, and the gospel of the grace of God. The first was impressive and public, as the revelation upon Sinai; the other appealed far more to the heart than to the imagination, and befitted well the kingdom that was not with observation, the King who grew up like a tender plant, and did not strive nor cry, the redeeming influence which was at first unobtrusive as the least of all seeds, but became a tree, and the shelter of the fowls of heaven.

* *Speaker's Commentary*, i., p. 242; Kalisch on viii. 18; Kiel, i. 484.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND PLAGUE.

viii. 1-15.

ALTHOUGH Pharaoh had warning of the first plague, no appeal was made to him to avert it by submission. But before the plague of frogs he was distinctly commanded, "Let My people go." It is an advancing lesson. He has felt the power of Jehovah: now he is to connect, even more closely, his suffering with his disobedience; and when this is accomplished, the third plague will break upon him unannounced—a loud challenge to his conscience to become itself his judge.

The plague of frogs was far greater than our experience helps us to imagine. At least two cases are on record of a people being driven to abandon their settlements because they had become intolerable; "as even the vessels were full of them, the water infested and the food uneatable, as they could scarcely set their feet on the ground without treading on heaps of them, and as they were vexed by the smell of the great multitude that died, they fled from that region."

The Egyptian species known to science as the Rana Mosaica, and still called by the uncommon epithet here employed, is peculiarly repulsive, and peculiarly noisy too. The superstition which adored a frog as the

"Queen of the two Worlds," and placed it upon the sacred lotus-leaf, would make it impossible for an Egyptian to adopt even such forlorn measures of self-defence as might suggest themselves. It was an unclean pest against which he was entirely helpless, and it extended the power of his enemy from the river to the land. The range of the grievance is dwelt upon in the warning: "they shall come up and enter into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy bed . . . and into thine ovens, and into thy kneading-troughs (viii. 3). The most sequestered and the dryest spots alike would swarm with them, thrust forward into the most unsuitable places by the multitude behind.

Thus Pharaoh himself had to share, far more than in the first plague, the misery of his humblest subjects; and, although again his magicians imitated Aaron upon some small prepared plot, and amid circumstances which made it easier to exhibit frogs than to exclude them, yet there was no comfort in such puerile emulation, and they offered no hope of relieving him. From the gods that were only vanities, he turned to Jehovah, and abased himself to ask the intercession of Moses: "Intreat Jehovah that He take away the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go."

The assurance would have been a hopeful one, if only the sense of inconvenience were the same as the sense of sin. But when we wonder at the relapses of men who were penitent upon sick-beds or in adversity, as soon as their trouble is at an end, we are blind to this distinction. Pain is sometimes obviously due to ourselves, and it is natural to blame the conduct which led to it. But if we blame it only for being disastrous, we cannot hope that the fruits of the Spirit will result

from a sensation of the flesh. It was so with Pharaoh, as doubtless Moses expected, since God had not yet exhausted His predicted works of retribution. This anticipated fraud is much the simplest explanation of the difficult phrase, "Have thou this glory over me."

It is sometimes explained as an expression of courtesy—"I obey thee as a superior"; which does not occur elsewhere, because it is not Hebrew but Egyptian. But this suavity is quite alien to the spirit of the narrative, in which Moses, however courteous, represents an offended God. It is more natural to take it as an open declaration that he was being imposed upon, yet would grant to the king whatever advantage the fraud implied. And to make the coming relief more clearly the action of the Lord, to shut out every possibility that magician or priest should claim the honour, he bade the king name an hour at which the plague should cease.

If the frogs passed away at once, the relief might chance to be a natural one; and Pharaoh doubtless conceived that elaborate and long protracted intercessions were necessary for his deliverance. Accordingly he fixed a future period, yet as near as he perhaps thought possible; and Moses, without any express authority, promised him that it should be so. Therefore he "cried unto the Lord," and the frogs did not retreat into the river, but suddenly died where they were, and filled the unhappy land with a new horror in their decay.

But "when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he made his heart heavy and hearkened not unto them." It is a graphic sentence: it implies rather than affirms their indignant remonstrances, and the sullen, dull, spiritless obstinacy with which he held his base and unkingly purpose.

THE THIRD PLAGUE.

viii. 16-19.

There is no sufficient reason for discarding the ordinary opinion of this plague. Gnats have been suggested (with beetles instead of flies for the fourth, since gnats and flies would scarcely make two several judgments), but these, which spring from marshy ground, would unfitly be connected with the dust whence Aaron was to evoke the pest. Sir Samuel Baker, on the other hand, has said of modern Egypt that "it seemed as if the very dust were turned into lice" (quoted in Speaker's Commentary *in loco*).

Two features in this plague deserve attention. It came without any warning whatever. The faithless king who gave his word and broke it found himself involved in fresh miseries without an opportunity of humbling himself again. He was flung back into deep waters, because he refused to fulfil the terms upon which he had been extricated.

It must be understood that the act of Aaron was a public one, performed in the sight of Pharaoh, and instantly followed by the plague. There was no doubt about the origin of the pest, and the new and alarming prospect was opened up of calamities yet to come, without a chance to avert them by submission.

Again, it will be observed that the magicians are utterly baffled just when there is no warning given, and therefore no opportunity for pre-arranged sleight of hand. And this surely favours the opinion that they had not hitherto succeeded by supernatural assistance, for there is no such evident reason why infernal aid should cease at this exact point.

It is a mistake to suppose that thereupon they confessed the mission of the brothers. In their agitation they admitted that, on their part at least, no divinity had been at work before. But they rather ascribed what they saw to the action of some vaguely indicated deity, than confessed it to be the work of Jehovah. Again it has to be asked whether this resembles more the vainglorious structure of a myth, or the course of a truthful history.

Nevertheless, their grudging and insufficient avowal was meant to induce a surrender. But "Pharaoh's heart was strong, and he hearkened not unto them." To this statement it is not added, "because the Lord had hardened him," for this had not even yet taken place; but only, "as the Lord had spoken."

THE FOURTH PLAGUE.

viii. 20-32.

When the third plague had died away, when the sense of reaction and exhaustion had replaced agitation and distress, and when perhaps the fear grew strong that at any moment a new calamity might befal the land as abruptly as the last, God orders a solemn and urgent appeal to be made to the oppressor. And the same occurs three times: after each plague which arrives unexpectedly the next is introduced by a special warning. On each of these occasions, moreover, the appeal is made in the morning, at the hour when reason ought to be clearest and the passions least agitating; and this circumstance is perhaps alluded to in the favourite phrase of Jeremiah when he would speak of condescending earnestness—"I sent my people ... rising up early and sending them"

(Jer. xxv. 4, xxvi. 5, xxix. 19, and many more; cf. also vii. 13, and 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15). So far is the Scripture from regarding Pharaoh as propelled by destiny, as by a machine, down iron grooves to ruin.

We have now come to the group of plagues which inflict actual bodily damage, and not inconvenience and humiliation only: the dogfly (or beetle); the murrain among beasts, which was a precursor of the crowning evil that struck at human life; and the boils. Of the fourth plague the precise nature is uncertain. There is a beetle which gnaws both man and beast, destroys clothes, furniture, and plants, and even now they "are often seen in millions" (Munk, *Palestine*, p. 120). "In a few minutes they filled the whole house. . . . Only after the most laborious exertions, and covering the floor of the house with hot coals, they succeeded in mastering them. If they make such attacks during the night, the inmates are compelled to give up the houses, and little children or sick persons, who are unable to rise alone, are then exposed to the greatest danger of life" (Pratte, *Abyssinia*, p. 143, in Kalisch).

Now, this explanation has one advantage over that of dogflies—that special mention is made of their afflicting "the ground whereon they are" (ver. 21), which is less suitable to a plague of flies. But it may be that no one creature is meant. The Hebrew word means "a mixture." Jewish interpreters have gone so far as to make it mean "all kinds of noxious animals and serpents and scorpions mixed together," and although it is palpably absurd to believe that Pharaoh should have survived if these had been upon him and upon his servants, yet the expression "a mixture," following after one kind of vermin had tormented the land, need not be narrowed too exactly. With deliberate parti-

cularity the king was warned that they should come "upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thine houses, and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of [them *], and also the ground whereon they are."

It has been supposed, from the special mention of the exemption of the land of Goshen, that this was a new thing. We have seen reason, however, to think otherwise, and the emphatic assertion now made is easy to understand. The plague was especially to be expected in low fat ground: the king may not even have been aware of the previous freedom of Israel; and in any case its importance as an evidence had not been pressed upon him. The spirit of the seventy-eighth Psalm, though not perhaps any one specific phrase, contrasts the earlier as well as the later plagues with the protection of His own people, whom He led like sheep (vers. 42-52).

After the appointed interval (the same which Pharaoh had indicated for the removal of the frogs) the plague came. We are told that the land was corrupted, but it is significant that more stress is laid upon the suffering of Pharaoh and his court in the event than in the menace. It came home to himself more cruelly than any former plague, and he at once attempted to make terms: "Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land." It is a natural speech, at first not asking to be trusted as before by getting relief before the Hebrews actually enjoy their liberty; and yet conceding as little as possible, and in hot haste to have that little done and

* The Revised Version has "swarms of flies," which is clearly an attempt to meet the case. But it is worth notice that in the Psalms the expression was twice rendered "divers kinds of flies" (lxxviii. 45, cv. 31 A.V.) The word occurs only of this plague.

the relief obtained. They may even serve their God on the sacred soil, so completely has He already defeated all His rivals. But this was not what was demanded; and Moses repeated the claim of a three days' journey, basing it upon the ground, still more insulting to the national religion, that "We will sacrifice to Jehovah our God the abomination of the Egyptians," that is to say, sacred animals, which it is horror in their eyes to sacrifice. Any faith in his own creed which Pharaoh ever had is surrendered when this argument, instead of making their cause hopeless, forces him to yield—adding, however, like a thoroughly weak man who wishes to refuse but dares not, "only ye shall not go very far away: intreat for me." And again Moses concedes the point, with only the courteous remonstrance, "But let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more."

It is necessary to repeat that we have not a shred of evidence that Moses would have violated his compact and failed to return: it would have sufficed as a first step to have asserted the nationality of his people and their right to worship their own God: all the rest would speedily have followed. But the terms which were rejected again and again did not continue for ever to bind the victorious party: the story of their actual departure makes it plain that both sides understood it to be a final exodus; and thence came the murderous pursuit of Pharaoh (cf. xv. 9), which in itself would have cancelled any compact which had existed until then.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIFTH PLAGUE.

ix. 1-7.

OUR Lord when on earth came not to destroy men's lives. And yet it was necessary, for our highest instruction, that we should not think of Him as revealing a Divinity wholly devoid of sternness. Twice, therefore, a gleam of the fires of justice fell on the eyes which followed Him—through the destruction once of a barren tree, and once of a herd of swine, which property no Jew should have possessed. So now, when half the gloomy round of the plagues was being completed, it was necessary to prove that life itself was staked on this desperate hazard; and this was done first by the very same expedient—the destruction of life which was not human. There is something pathetic, if one thinks of it, in the extent to which domestic animals share our fortunes, and suffer through the brutality or the recklessness of their proprietors. If all men were humane, self-controlled, and (as a natural result) prosperous, what a weight would be uplifted from the lower levels also of created life, all of which groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now! The dumb animal world is partner with humanity, and shares its fate, as each animal is dependent on its individual owner.

We have already seen the whole life of Egypt stricken, but now the lower creatures are to perish, unless Pharaoh will repent. He is once more summoned in the name of "Jehovah, God of the Hebrews," and warned that the hand of Jehovah, even a very grievous murrain (for so the verse appears to say), is "upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the herds and upon the flocks." Here some particulars need observation. Herds and flocks were everywhere; but horses were a comparatively late introduction into Egypt, where they were as yet chiefly employed for war. Asses, still so familiar to the traveller, were the usual beasts of burden, and were owned in great numbers by the rich, although rash controversialists have pretended that, as being unclean, they were not tolerated in the land.

Camels, it is said, are not to be found on the monuments, but yet they were certainly known and possessed by Egypt, though there were many reasons why they should be held chiefly on the frontiers, and perhaps in connection with the Arabian mines and settlements. Upon all these "in the field" the plague should come.

The murrain still works havoc in the Delta, chiefly at the period, beginning with December, when the floods are down and the cattle are turned out into the pastures, which would this year have been signally unwholesome. It was not, then, the fact of a cattle plague which was miraculous, but its severity, its coming at an appointed time, its assailing beasts of every kind, and its exempting those of Israel. We are told that "all the cattle of Egypt died," and yet that afterwards "the hail . . . smote both man and beast" (ix. 6, 25). It is an inconsistency very

serious in the eyes of people who are too stupid or too uncandid to observe that, just before, the mischief was limited to those cattle which were "in the field" (ver. 3). There were great stalls in suitable places, to give them shelter during the inundations; and all that had not yet been driven out to graze are expressly exempted from the plague.

Much of Pharaoh's own property perished, but he was the last man in the country who would feel personal inconvenience by the loss, and therefore nothing was more natural than that his selfish "heart was heavy, and he did not let the people go." Not even such an effort was needed as in the previous plague, when we read that he made his heart heavy, by a deliberate act.

There was nothing to indicate that he had now reached a crisis—that God Himself in His judgment would henceforth make bold and resolute against crushing adversities the heart which had been obdurate against humanity, against evidence, against honour and plighted faith. Nothing is easier than to step over the frontier between great nations. And in the moral world also the Rubicon is passed, the destiny of a soul is fixed, sometimes without a struggle, unawares.

Instead of spiritual conflict, there was intellectual curiosity. "Pharaoh sent, and behold there was not so much as one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was heavy, and he did not let the people go." This inquiry into a phenomenon which was surprising indeed, but yet quite unable to affect his action, recalls the spiritual condition of Herod, who was conscience-stricken when first he heard of Christ, and said, "It is John whom I beheaded" (Mark vi. 16), but afterwards felt merely vulgar

curiosity and desire to behold a sign of Him. In the case of Pharaoh it was the next step to judicial infatuation. When Christ confronted Herod, He, Who had explained Himself to Pilate, was absolutely silent. And this warns us not to think that an interest in religious problems is itself of necessity religious. One may understand all mysteries, and yet it may profit him nothing. And many a reprobate soul is controversial, acute, and keenly orthodox.

THE SIXTH PLAGUE.

ix. 8-12.

At the close of the second triplet, as of the first, stands a plague without a warning, but not without the clearest connection between the blow and Him who deals it.

To the Jews Egypt was a furnace in which they were being consumed—whether literally in human sacrifice, or metaphorically in the hard labour which wasted them (Deut. iv. 20). And now the brothers were commanded to fill both hands with ashes of the furnace and throw them upon the wind,* either to symbolise the suffering which was to be spread wide over the land, or because the ashes of human sacrifices were thus presented to their evil genius, Typhon. If this were its meaning, the irony was keen, when at the same action a feverish inflammation breaking out in blains spread over all the nation.

But, apart from any such reference to their cruel idolatry, it was right that they should suffer in the

* The passage in Deuteronomy had not this event specially in mind, or it would have used the same term for a furnace. The word for ashes implies what can be blown upon the wind.

flesh. When the higher nature is dead, there is no appeal so sharp and certain as to the physical sensibility. And moreover, there are other sins which have their root in the flesh besides sloth and bodily indulgence. Wrath and cruelty and pride are strangely stimulated and excited by self-indulgence. Not in vain does St. Paul describe a "mind of the flesh," and reckon among the fruits of the flesh not only uncleanness and drunkenness, but, just as truly, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, heresies (Col. ii. 18; Gal. v. 19, 20). From such evil tempers, stimulated by evil appetites, the slaves of Egypt had suffered bitterly; and now the avenging rod fell upon the bodies of their tyrants.

And we may perhaps detect especial suffering, certainly an especial triumph to be commemorated, in the failure of the magicians even to stand before the king. It is implied that they had done so until now, and this confirms the belief that after the third plague they had not acknowledged Jehovah, but merely said in their defeat, "This is the finger of a god." Until now Jannes and Jambres (two, to rival the two brothers) had withstood Moses, but now the contrast between the prophet and his victims writhing in their pain was too sharp for prejudice itself to overlook: their folly was "evident unto all men" (2 Tim. iii. 8, 9). But it was not destined that Pharaoh should yield even to so tremendous a coercion what he refused to moral influences; and as Jesus after His resurrection appeared not unto all the people (hiding this crowning evidence from the eyes which had in vain beheld so much), so "the Lord made strong the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had spoken unto Moses." In this last expression is the explicit statement that it was now that the prediction

attained fulfilment, in the manner which we have discussed already.

But even this strength of heart did not reach the height of attempting any reprisals upon the torturers. The sense of the supernatural was their defence: Moses was as a god unto Pharaoh, and Aaron was his prophet.

In the narrative of this plague there is an expression which deserves attention for another reason. The ashes, it says, "shall become dust." Is there no controversy, turning upon the too rigid and prosaic straining of a New Testament construction, which might be simplified by considering the Hebrew use of language, exemplified in such an assertion as "It shall become dust," and soon after, "It is the Lord's passover"? Do these announce transubstantiations? Did two handfuls of ashes literally become the blains upon the bodies of all the Egyptians?

THE SEVENTH PLAGUE.

ix. 13-35.

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart, we have argued, was not the debauching of his spirit, but only the strengthening of his will. "Wait on the Lord and *be of good courage*"; "*Be strong*, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and *be strong*, O Joshua, son of Josadak the high priest; and *be strong*, all ye people" (Ps. xxvii. 14; Hag. ii. 4), are clear proofs that what was implied in this word was not wickedness, but only that iron determination which his choice directed in a wicked channel. And therefore it was no mockery, no insincere appeal by one who had provided against the mischance of its succeeding, when God again addressed Himself

to the reason, and even to the rational fears of Pharaoh. He had only provided against a terror-stricken submission, as wholly immoral and valueless, as the ceasing to resist of one who has swooned through fright. Now, to give such an one a stimulant and thus to enable him to exercise his volition, would be different from inciting him to rebel.

The seventh plague, then, is ushered in by an expostulation more earnest, resolute and minatory than attended any of the previous ones. And this is the more necessary because human life is now for the first time at stake. First the king is solemnly reminded that Jehovah, Whom he no longer can refuse to know, is the God of the Hebrews, has a claim upon their services, and demands them. In oppressing the nation, therefore, Pharaoh usurped what belonged to the Lord. Now, this is the eternal charter of the rights of all humanity. Whoever encroaches on the just sphere of the free action of his neighbour deprives him, to exactly the same extent, of the power to glorify God by a free obedience. The heart glorifies God by submission to so hard a lot, but the co-operation of the "whole body and soul and spirit" does not visibly bear testimony to the regulating power of grace. The oppressor may contend (like some slave-owners) that he guides his human property better than it would guide itself. But one assertion he cannot make: namely, that God is receiving the loyal homage of a life spontaneously devoted; that a man and not a machine is glorifying God in this body and spirit which are God's. For the body is but a chattel. This is why the Christian doctrine of the religious equality of all men in Christ carries with it the political assertion of the equal secular rights of the whole human race. I must not

transfer to myself the solemn duty of my neighbour to offer up to God the sacrifice not only of his chastened spirit but also of his obedient life.

And these words were also a lifelong admonition to every Israelite. He held his liberties from God. He was not free to be violent and wanton, and to say "I am delivered to commit all these abominations." The dignities of life were bound up with its responsibilities.

Well, it is not otherwise to-day. As truly as Moses, the champions of our British liberties were earnest and God-fearing men. Not for leave to revel, to accumulate enormous fortunes, and to excite by their luxuries the envy and rage of neglected brothers, while possessing more enormous powers to bless them than ever were entrusted to a class,—not for this our heroes bled on the field and on the scaffold. Tyrants rarely deny to rich men leave to be self-indulgent. And self-indulgence rarely nerves men to heroic effort. It is for the freedom of the soul that men dare all things. And liberty is doomed wherever men forget that the true freeman is the servant of Jehovah. On these terms the first demand for a national emancipation was enforced.

And next, Pharaoh is warned that God, who at first threatened to destroy his firstborn, but had hitherto come short of such a deadly stroke, had not, as he might flatter himself, exhausted His power to avenge. Pharaoh should yet experience "*all* My plagues." And there is a dreadful significance in the phrase which threatens to put these plagues, with regard to others, "upon thy servants and upon thy people," but with regard to Pharaoh himself "upon thine heart."

There it was that the true scourge smote. Thence came ruin and defeat. His infatuation was more dreadful than hail in the cloud and locusts on the

blast, than the darkness at noon and the midnight wail of a bereaved nation. For his infatuation involved all these.

The next assertion is not what the Authorised Version made it, and what never was fulfilled. It is not, "Now I will stretch out My hand to smite thee and thy people with pestilence, and thou shalt be cut off from the earth." It says, "Now I had done this, as far as any restraint for thy sake is concerned, but in very deed for this cause have I made thee to stand" (unsmitten), "for to show thee My power, and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth" (vers. 15, 16). The course actually taken was more for the glory of God, and a better warning to others, than a sudden stroke, however crushing.

And so we find, many years after all this generation has passed away, that a strangely distorted version of these events is current among the Philistines in Palestine. In the days of Eli, when the ark was brought into the camp, they said, "Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all manner of plagues in the wilderness" (1 Sam. iv. 8). And this, along with the impression which Rahab declared that the Exodus and what followed it had made, may help us to understand what a mighty influence upon the wars of Palestine the scourging of Egypt had, how terror fell upon all the inhabitants of the land, and they melted away (Josh. ii. 9, 10).

And perhaps it may save us from the unconscious egoism which always deems that I myself shall not be treated quite as severely as I deserve, to mark how the punishment of one affects the interests of all.

Added to all this is a kind of half-ironical clemency,

an opportunity of escape if he would humble himself so far as to take warning even to a small extent. The plague was to be of a kind especially rare in Egypt, and of utterly unknown severity—such hail as had not been in Egypt since the day it was founded until now. But he and his people might, if they would, hasten to bring in their cattle and all that they had in the field. Pharaoh, after his sore experience of the threats of Moses, would find it a hard trial in any case, whether to withdraw his property or to brave the stroke. To him it was a kind of challenge. To those of his subjects who had any proper feeling it was a merciful deliverance, and a profoundly skilful education of their faith, which began by an obedience probably hesitating, but had few doubts upon the morrow. We read that he who feared the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses; and this is the first hint that the plagues, viewed as discipline, were not utterly vain. The existence of others who feared Jehovah beside the Jews prepares us for the "mixed multitude" who came up along with them (xii. 38), and whose ill-instructed and probably very selfish adhesion was quite consistent with such sensual discontent as led the whole congregation into sin (Num. xi. 4).

To make the connection between Jehovah and the impending storm more obvious still, Moses stretched his rod toward heaven, and there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, such as slew man and beast, and smote the trees, and destroyed all the vegetation which had yet grown up. The heavens, the atmosphere, were now enrolled in the conspiracy against Pharaoh: they too served Jehovah.

In such a storm, the terror was even greater than

the peril. When a great writer of our own time called attention to the elaborate machinery by which God in nature impresses man with the sense of a formidable power above, he chose a thunderstorm as the most striking example of his meaning.

"Nothing appears to me more remarkable than the array of scenic magnificence by which the imagination is appalled, in myriads of instances when the actual danger is comparatively small; so that the utmost possible impression of awe shall be produced upon the minds of all, though direct suffering is inflicted upon few. Consider, for instance, the moral effect of a single thunderstorm. Perhaps two or three persons may be struck dead within a space of a hundred square miles; and their death, unaccompanied by the scenery of the storm, would produce little more than a momentary sadness in the busy hearts of living men. But the preparation for the judgment, by all that mighty gathering of the clouds; by the questioning of the forest leaves, in their terrified stillness, which way the winds shall go forth; by the murmuring to each other, deep in the distance, of the destroying angels before they draw their swords of fire; by the march of the funeral darkness in the midst of the noonday, and the rattling of the dome of heaven beneath the chariot wheels of death;—on how many minds do not these produce an impression almost as great as the actual witnessing of the fatal issue! and how strangely are the expressions of the threatening elements fitted to the apprehensions of the human soul! The lurid colour, the long, irregular, convulsive sound, the ghastly shapes of flaming and heaving cloud, are all true and faithful in their appeal to our instinct of danger."—Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, III. 197-8.

Such a tempest, dreadful anywhere, would be most appalling of all in the serene atmosphere of Egypt, to unaccustomed spectators, and minds troubled by their guilt. Accordingly we find that Pharaoh was less terrified by the absolute mischief done than by the "voices of God," when, unnerved for the moment, he confessed at least that he had sinned "this time" (a singularly weak repentance for his long and daring resistance, even if we explain it, "this time I confess that I have sinned"), and went on in his terror to pour out orthodox phrases and professions with suspicious fluency. The main point was the bargain which he proposed: "Intreat the Lord, for there hath been enough of mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer."

Looking attentively at all this, we discern in it a sad resemblance to some confessions of these latter days. Men are driven by affliction to acknowledge God: they confess the offence which is palpable, and even add that God is righteous and that they are not. If possible, they shelter themselves from lonely condemnation by general phrases, such as that all are wicked; just as Pharaoh, although he would have scoffed at the notion of any national volition except his own, said, "I and my people are sinners." Above all, they are much more anxious for the removal of the rod than for the cleansing of the guilt; and if this can be accomplished through the mediation of another, they have as little desire as Pharaoh had for any personal approach to God, Whom they fear, and if possible repel.

And by these signs, every experienced observer expects that if they are delivered out of trouble they will forget their vows.

Moses was exceedingly meek. And therefore, or else because the message of God implied that other plagues were to succeed this, he consented to intercede, yet adding the simple and dignified protest, "As for thee and thy people, I know that ye will not yet fear Jehovah God." And so it came to pass. The heart of Pharaoh was made heavy, and he would not let Israel go.

Looking back upon this miracle, we are reminded of the mighty part which atmospheric changes have played in the history of the world. Snowstorms saved Europe from the Turk and from Napoleon: the wind played almost as important a part in our liberation from James, and again in the defeat of the plans of the French Revolution to invade us, as in the destruction of the Armada. And so we read, "Hast thou entered the treasuries of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasuries of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?" (Job xxxviii. 22-3).

* Except in one passage (Gen. ii. 4 to iii. 23) these titles of Deity are nowhere else combined in the books of Moses.

CHAPTER X.

THE EIGHTH PLAGUE.

x. 1-20.

THE Lord would not command His servant again to enter the dangerous presence of the sullen prince, without a reason which would sustain his faith: "For I have made heavy his heart." The pronoun is emphatic: it means to say, 'His foolhardiness is My doing and cannot go beyond My will: thou art safe.' And the same encouragement belongs to all who do the sacred will: not a hair of their head shall truly perish, since life and death are the servants of their God. Thus, in the storm of human passion, as of the winds, He says, "It is I, be not afraid"; making the wrath of man to praise Him, stilling alike the tumult of the waves and the madness of the people.

It is possible that even the merciful mitigations of the last plague were used by infatuated hearts to justify their wilfulness: the most valuable crops of all had escaped; so that these judgments, however dire, were not quite beyond endurance. Just such a course of reasoning deludes all who forget that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance.

Besides the reasons already given for lengthening out the train of judgments, it is added that Israel should teach the story to posterity, and both fathers and children should "know that I am Jehovah."

Accordingly it became a favourite title—"The Lord which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Even the apostates under Sinai would not reject so illustrious a memory: their feast was nominally to Jehovah; and their idol was an image of "the gods which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (xxxii. 4, 5).

Has *our* land no deliverances for which to be thankful? Instead of boastful self-assertion, should we not say, "We have heard with our ears, O God, and our fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that Thou didst in their days and in the old time before them?" Have we forgotten that national mercies call aloud for national thanksgiving? And in the family, and in the secret life of each, are there no rescues, no emancipations, no enemies overcome by a hand not our own, which call for reverent acknowledgment? "These things were our examples, and are written for our admonition."

The reproof now spoken to Pharaoh is sterner than any previous one. There is no reasoning in it. The demand is peremptory: "How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself?" With it is a sharp and short command: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me." And with this is a detailed and tremendous threat. It is strange, in the face of the knowledge accumulated since the objection called for it, to remember that once this narrative was challenged, because locusts, it was said, are unknown in Egypt. They are mentioned in the inscriptions. Great misery was caused by them in 1463, and just three hundred years later Niebuhr was himself at Cairo during a plague of them. Equally arbitrary is the objection that Joel predicted locusts "such as there hath not been ever the like, neither

shall be any more after them, even to the years of many generations" (ii. 2), whereas we read of these that "before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such" (x. 14). The objection is whimsical in its absurdity, when we remember that Joel spoke distinctly of Zion and the holy mountain (ii. 1), and Exodus of "the borders of Egypt" (x. 14).

But it is true that locusts are comparatively rare in Egypt; so that while the meaning of the threat would be appreciated, familiarity would not have steeled them against it. The ravages of the locust are terrible indeed, and coming just in time to ruin the crops which had escaped the hail, would complete the misery of the land.

One speaks of the sudden change of colour by the disappearance of verdure where they alight as being like the rolling up of a carpet; and here we read "they shall cover the eye of the earth,"—a phrase peculiar to the Pentateuch (ver. 15; Num. xxii. 5, 11); and they shall eat the residue of that which has escaped, . . . and they shall fill thy houses, and the . . . houses of all the Egyptians, which neither thy fathers nor thy fathers' fathers have seen."

After uttering the appointed warning, Moses abruptly left, awaiting no negociations, plainly regarding them as vain.

But now, for the first time, the servants of Pharaoh interfered, declared the country to be ruined, and pressed him to surrender. And yet it was now first that we read (ver. 1) that their hearts were hardened as well as his. For that is a hard heart that does not remonstrate against wrong, however plainly God reveals His displeasure, until new troubles are at hand, and

which even then has no regard for the wrongs of Israel, but only for the woes of Egypt. It is a hard heart, therefore, which intends to repent upon its deathbed; for its motives are identical with these.

Pharaoh's behaviour is that of a spoiled child, who is indeed the tyrant most familiar to us. He feels that he must yield, or else why should the brothers be recalled? And yet, when it comes to the point, he tries to play the master still, by dictating the terms for his own surrender; and breaks off the negociation rather than do frankly what he must feel that it is necessary to do. Moses laid his finger accurately upon the disease when he reproached him for refusing to humble himself. And if his behaviour seem unnatural, it is worth observation that Napoleon, the greatest modern example of proud, intellectual, godless infatuation, allowed himself to be crushed at Leipsic through just the same reluctance to do thoroughly and without self-deception what he found it necessary to consent to do. "Napoleon," says his apologist, Thiers, "at length determined to retreat—a resolution humbling to his pride. Unfortunately, instead of a retreat frankly admitted . . . he determined on one which from its imposing character should not be a real retreat at all, and should be accomplished in open day." And this perversity, which ruined him, is traced back to "the illusions of pride."

Well, it was quite as hard for the Pharaoh to surrender at discretion, as for the Corsican to stoop to a nocturnal retreat. Accordingly, he asks, "Who are ye that shall go?" and when Moses very explicitly and resolutely declares that they will all go, with all their property, his passion overcomes him, he feels that to consent is to lose them for ever, and he exclaims,

"So be Jehovah with you as I will let you go and your little ones: look to it, for evil is before you"—that is to say, Your intentions are bad. "Go ye that are men, and serve the Lord, for that is what ye desire,"—no more than that is implied in your demand, unless it is a mere pretence, under which more lurks than it avows.

But he and they have long been in a state of war: menaces, submissions, and treacheries have followed each other fast, and he has no reason to complain if their demands are raised. Moreover, his own nation celebrated religious festivals in company with their wives and children, so that his rejoinder is an empty outburst of rage. And of a Jewish feast it was said a little later, "Thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou and thy son and thy daughter, and thy manservant and thy maidservant . . . and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow" (Deut. xvi. 11). There was no insincerity in the demand; and although the suspicions of the king were naturally excited by the exultant and ever-rising hopes of the Hebrews, and the defiant attitude of Moses, yet even now there is as little reason to suspect bad faith as to suppose that Israel, once released, could ever have resumed the same abject attitude toward Egypt as before. They would have come back victorious, and therefore ready to formulate new demands; already half emancipated, and therefore prepared for the perfecting of the work.

And now, at a second command as explicit as that which bade him utter the warning, Moses, anxiously watched by many, stretched out his hand over the devoted realm. At the gesture, the spectators felt that a fiat had gone forth. But the result was strangely different from that which followed his invocation, both

of the previous and the following plague, when we may believe that as he raised his hand, the hail-storm burst in thunder, and the curtain fell upon the sky. Now there only arose a gentle east wind (unlike the "exceeding strong west wind" that followed), but it blew steadily all that day and all the following night. The forebodings of Egypt would understand it well: the prolonged period during which the curse was being steadily wafted toward them was an awful measure of the wide regions over which the power of Jehovah reached; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts, that dreadful curse which Joel has compared to a disciplined and devastating invader, "the army of the Lord," and the first woe that heralds the Day of the Lord in the Apocalypse (Joel ii. 1-11; Rev. ix. 1-11).

The completeness of the ruin brought a swift surrender, but it has been well said that folly is the wisdom which is only wise too late, and, let us add, too fitfully. If Pharaoh had only submitted before the plague instead of after it! * If he had only respected himself enough to be faithful, instead of being too vain really to yield!

It is an interesting coincidence that, since he had this time defied the remonstrances of his advisers, his confession of sin is entirely personal: it is no longer, "I and my people are sinners," but "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you." This last clause was bitter to his lips, but the need for their

* Oddly enough, the same historian already quoted, relating the story of the same day at Leipsic, says of Napoleon's dialogue with M. de Merfeld, that he "used an expression which, if uttered at the Congress of Prague, would have changed his lot and ours. Unfortunately, it was now too late."

intercession was urgent: life and death were at stake upon the removal of this dense cloud of creatures which penetrated everywhere, leaving everywhere an evil odour, and of which a later sufferer complains, "We could not eat, but we bit a locust; nor open our mouths, but locusts filled them."

Therefore he went on to entreat volubly, "Forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat Jehovah your God that He may take away from me this death only."

And at the prayer of Moses, the Lord caused the breeze to veer and rise into a hurricane: "The Lord turned an exceeding strong west wind." Now, the locust can float very well upon an easy breeze, and so it had been wafted over the Red Sea; but it is at once beaten down by a storm, and when it touches the water it is destroyed. Thus simply was the plague removed.

"But the Lord made strong Pharaoh's heart," and so, his fears being conquered, his own rebellious will went on upon its evil way. He would not let Israel go.

This narrative throws light upon a thousand vows made upon sick beds, but broken when the sufferer recovers; and a thousand prayers for amendment, breathed in all the sincerity of panic, and forgotten with all the levity of security. It shows also, in the hesitating and abortive half-submission of the tyrant, the greater folly of many professing Christians, who will, for Christ's sake, surrender all their sins except one or two, and make any confession except that which really brings low their pride.

Thoroughness, decision, depth, and self-surrender, needed by Pharaoh, are needed by every soul of man.

THE NINTH PLAGUE.

x. 21-29.

We have taken it as settled that the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Menephtah, the Beloved of the God Ptah. If so, his devotion to the gods throws a curious light upon his first scorn of Jehovah, and his long continued resistance; and also upon the threat of vengeance to be executed upon the gods of Egypt, as if they were a resisting power. But there is a special significance in the ninth plague, when we connect it with Menephtah.

In the Tombs of the Kings at Thebes there is to be seen, fresh and lifelike, the admirably sculptured effigy of this king—a weak and cruel face, with the receding forehead of his race, but also their nose like a beak, and their sharp chin. Over his head is the inscription—

> "Lord of the Two Lands, Beloved of the God Amen;
> Lord of Diadems, Beloved of the God Ptah:
> Crowned by Amen with dominion of the world:
> Cherished by the Sun in the great abode."

This formidable personage is delineated by the court sculptor with his hand stretched out in worship, and under it is written "He adores the Sun: he worships Hor of the solar horizons."

The worship, thus chosen as the most characteristic of this king, either by himself or by some consummate artist, was to be tested now.

Could the sun help him? or was it, like so many minor forces of earth and air, at the mercy of the God of Israel?

There is a terrible abruptness about the coming of

the ninth plague. Like the third and sixth, it is inflicted unannounced; and the parleying, the driving of a bargain and then breaking it, by which the eighth was attended, is quite enough to account for this. Moreover, the experience of every man teaches him that each method has its own impressiveness: the announcement of punishment awes, and a surprise alarms, and when they are alternated, every possible door of access to the conscience is approached. If the heart of Pharaoh was now beyond hope, it does not follow that all his people were equally hardened. What an effect was produced upon those courtiers who so earnestly supported the recent demand of Moses, when this new plague fell upon them unawares!

But not only is there no announcement: the narrative is so concentrated and brief as to give a graphic rendering of the surprise and terror of the time. Not a word is wasted:—

"The Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness that may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place three days; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (vers. 21-3). We are not told anything of the emotions of the king, as the prophet strides into his presence, and before the cowering court, silently raises his hand and quenches the day. We may infer his temper, if we please, from the frantic outbreak of menace and rage in which he presently warns the man whose coming is the same thing as calamity to see his face no more. Nothing is said, again, about the evil angels by which, according

to later narratives, that long night was haunted.* And after all it is more impressive to think of the blank, utter paralysis of dread in which a nation held its breath, benumbed and motionless, until vitality was almost exhausted, and even Pharaoh chose rather to surrender than to die.

As the people lay cowering in their fear, there was plenty to occupy their minds. They would remember the first dreadful threat, not yet accomplished, to slay their firstborn; and the later assertion that if pestilence had not destroyed them, it was because God would plague them with all His plagues. They would reflect upon all their defeated duties, and how the sun himself was now withdrawn at the waving of the prophet's hand. And then a ghastly foreboding would complete their dread. What was it that darkness typified, in every Oriental nation—nay, in all the world? Death! Job speaks of

> "The land of darkness and of the shadow of death;
> A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself;
> A land of the shadow of death without any order,
> And where the light is as darkness" (x. 21, 22).

With us, a mortal sentence is given in a black cap; in the East, far more expressively, the head of the culprit was covered, and the darkness which thus came upon him expressed his doom. Thus "they covered Haman's face" (Esther vii. 8). Thus to destroy "the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples and the veil that is spread over all nations," is the same thing as to "swallow up death," being the visible destruction of the embodied death-sentence (Isa. xxv. 7, 8). And

* Such is probably not the meaning in Ps. lxxviii. 49 (see R.V.), though from it the tradition may have sprung.

now this veil was spread over all the radiant land of Egypt. Chill, and hungry, and afraid to move, the worst horror of all that prolonged midnight was the mental agony of dire anticipation.

In other respects there had been far worse calamities, but through its effect upon the imagination this dreadful plague was a fit prelude to the tenth, which it hinted and premonished.

In the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom there is a remarkable study of this plague, regarded as retribution in kind. It avenges the oppression of Israel. "For when unrighteous men thought to oppress the holy nation, they being shut up in their houses, the prisoners of darkness, and fettered with the bonds of a long night, lay exiled from the eternal Providence" (xvii. 2). It expresses in the physical realm their spiritual misery: "For while they supposed to lie hid in their secret sins, they were scattered under a thick veil of forgetfulness" (ver. 3). It retorted on them the illusions of their sorcerers: "as for the illusions of art magick, they were put down. . . . For they, that promised to drive away terrors and troubles from a sick soul, were sick themselves of fear, worthy to be laughed at" (vers. 7, 8). In another place the Egyptians are declared to be worse than the men of Sodom, because they brought into bondage friends and not strangers, and grievously afflicted those whom they had received with feasting; "therefore even with blindness were these stricken, as those were at the doors of the righteous man." (xix. 14-17). And we may well believe that the long night was haunted with special terrors, if we add this wise explanation: "For wickedness, condemned by her own witness, is very timorous, and being pressed by conscience, always forecasteth grievous things. For"

—and this is a sentence of transcendent merit—"fear is nothing else than a betrayal of the succours that reason offereth" (xvii. 11, 12). Therefore it is concluded that their own hearts were their worst tormentors, alarmed by whistling winds, or melodious song of birds, or pleasing fall of waters, "for the whole world shined with clear light, and none were hindered in their labour: over them only was spread a heavy night, an image of that darkness which should afterward receive them: yet were they unto themselves more grievous than the darkness" (vers. 20, 21).

Isaiah, too, who is full of allusions to the early history of his people, finds in this plague of darkness an image of all mental distress and spiritual gloom. "We look for light, but behold darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity: we grope for the wall like the blind, yea, we grope as those that have no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the twilight" (lix. 10). Here the sinful nation is reduced to the misery of Egypt. But if she were obedient she would enjoy all the immunities of her forefathers amid Egyptian gloom: "Then shall thy light rise in darkness and thy obscurity as the noonday" (lviii. 10); "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee" (lx. 2).

And, indeed, in the spiritual light which is sown for the righteous, and the obscuration of the judgment of the impure, this miracle is ever reproduced.

The history of Menephtah is that of a mean and cowardly prince. Dreams forbade him to share the perils of his army; a prophecy induced him to submit to exile, until his firstborn was of age to recover his dominions for him; and all we know of him is admirably

suited to the character represented in this narrative. He will now submit once more, and this time every one shall go; yet he cannot make a frank concession: the flocks and herds (most valuable after the ravages of the murrain and the hail) must remain as a hostage for their return. But Moses is inflexible: not a hoof shall be left behind; and then the frenzy of a baffled autocrat breaks out into wild menaces; "Get thee from me; take heed to thyself; see my face no more; for in the day thou seest my face thou shalt die." The assent of Moses was grim: the rupture was complete. And when they once more met, it was the king that had changed his purpose, and on his face, not that of Moses, was the pallor of impending death.

In the conduct of the prophet, all through these stormy scenes, we see the difference between a meek spirit and a craven one. He was always ready to intercede; he never "reviles the ruler," nor transgresses the limits of courtesy toward his superior in rank; and yet he never falters, nor compromises, nor fails to represent worthily the awful Power he represents.

In the series of sharp contrasts, all the true dignity is with the servant of God, all the meanness and the shame with the proud king, who begins by insulting him, goes on to impose on him, and ends by the most ignominious of surrenders, crowned with the most abortive of treacheries and the most abject of defeats

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST PLAGUE ANNOUNCED.

xi. 1-10.

THE eleventh chapter is, strictly speaking, a supplement to the tenth: the first verses speak, as if in parenthesis, of a revelation made before the ninth plague, but held over to be mentioned in connection with the last, which it now announces; and the conversation with Pharaoh is a continuation of the same in which they mutually resolved to see each other's face no more. To account for the confidence of Moses, we are now told that God had revealed to him the close approach of the final blow, so long foreseen. In spite of seeming delays, the hour of the promise had arrived; in spite of his long reluctance, the king should even thrust them out; and then the order and discipline of their retreat would exhibit the advantages gained by expectation, by promises ofttimes disappointed, but always, like a false alarm which tries the readiness of a garrison, exhibiting the weak points in their organisation, and carrying their preparations farther.

The command given already to the women (iii. 22) is now extended to them all—that they should ask of the terror-stricken people such portable things as, however precious, poorly requited their generations of unpaid and cruel toil. (It has been already shown that the word

absurdly rendered "borrow" means to ask; and is the same as when Sisera *asked* water and Jael gave him milk, and when Solomon *asked* wisdom, and did not *ask* long life, neither *asked* riches, neither *asked* the life of his enemies.) They were now to claim such wages as they could carry off, and thus the pride of Egypt was presently dedicated to construct and beautify the tabernacle of Jehovah. We read that the people found favour with the Egyptians, who were doubtless overjoyed to come to any sort of terms with them; "moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people." This is no unbecoming vaunt: it speaks only of the high place he held, as God's deputy and herald; and this tone of keen appreciation of the rank conceded him, compared with the utter absence of any insistence upon any action of his own, is evidence much rather of the authenticity of the work than the reverse.

By these demands expectation and faith were intensified; while the tidings of such confidence on one side, and such tame submission on the other, goes far to explain the suspicions and the rage of Pharaoh.

With this the narrative is resumed. Moses had said, "Thou shalt see my face no more." Now he adds, "Thus saith Jehovah, About midnight" (but not on that same night, since four days of preparation for the passover were yet to come) "I will go out into the midst of Egypt." This, then, was the meaning of his ready consent to be seen no more: Jehovah Himself, Who had dealt so dreadfully with them through other hands, was now Himself to come. "And all the firstborn of Egypt shall die," from the firstborn and viceroy of the king to the firstborn of the meanest of women, and even of the cattle in their stalls. (It is surely a remark-

able coincidence that Menephtah's heroic son did actually sit upon his throne, that inscriptions engraven during his life exhibit his name in the royal cartouche, but that he perished early, and long before his father.) And the wail of demonstrative Oriental agony should be such as never was heard before. But the children of Israel should be distinguished and protected by their God. And all these courtiers should come and bow down before Moses (who even then has the good feeling not to include the king himself in this abasement), and instead of Pharaoh's insulting "Get thee from me—see my face no more," they should pray him saying, "Go hence, thou and thy people that follow thee." And remembering the abject entreaties, the infatuated treacheries, and now this crowning insult, he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. He was angry and sinned not.

The ninth and tenth verses are a kind of summary: the appeals to Pharaoh are all over, and henceforth we shall find Moses preparing his own followers for their exodus. "And the Lord (had) said unto Moses, Pharaoh will not hearken unto you, that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the Lord made strong Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land."

In the Gospel of St. John there comes just such a period. The record of miracle and controversy is at an end, and Jesus withdraws into the bosom of His intimate circle. It is scarcely possible that the evangelist was unconscious of the influence of this passage when he wrote: "But though He had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which he

spoke, Lord, who hath believed our report? . . . For this cause they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and should turn, and I should heal them" (John xii. 37-40).

This is the tragedy of Egypt repeated in Israel; and the fact that the chosen seed is now the reprobate suffices, if any doubt remain, to prove that reprobation itself was not caprice, but retribution.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PASSOVER.

xii. 1-28.

WE have now reached the birthday of the great Hebrew nation, and with it the first national institution, the feast of passover, which is also the first sacrifice of directly Divine institution, the earliest precept of the Hebrew legislation, and the only one given in Egypt.

The Jews had by this time learned to feel that they were a nation, if it were only through the struggle between their champion and the head of the greatest nation in the world. And the first aspect in which the feast of passover presents itself is that of a national commemoration.

This day was to be unto them the beginning of months; and in the change of their calendar to celebrate their emancipation, the device was anticipated by which France endeavoured to glorify the Revolution. All their reckoning was to look back to this signal event. "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it for a feast unto the Lord; throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever" (xii. 14). "It shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in thy mouth, for with a strong hand hath the Lord

brought thee out of Egypt. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year" (xiii. 9, 10).

Now for the first time we read of "the congregation of Israel" (xii. 3, 6), which was an assembly of the people represented by their elders (as may be seen by comparing the third verse with the twenty-first); and thus we discover that the "heads of houses" have been drawn into a larger unity. The clans are knit together into a nation.

Accordingly, the feast might not be celebrated by any solitary man. Companionship was vital to it. At every table one animal, complete and undissevered, should give to the feast a unity of sentiment; and as many should gather around as were likely to leave none of it uneaten. Neither might any of it be reserved to supply a hasty ration amid the confusion of the predicted march. The feast was to be one complete event, whole and perfect as the unity which it expressed. The very notion of a people is that of "community" in responsibilities, joys, and labours; and the solemn law by virtue of which, at this same hour, one blow will fall upon all Egypt, must now be accepted by Israel. Therefore loneliness at the feast of Passover is by the law, as well as in idea, impossible to any Jew. Every one can see the connection between this festival of unity and another, of which it is written, "We, being many, are one body, one loaf, for we are all partakers of that one loaf."

Now, the sentiment of nationality may so assert itself, like all exaggerated sentiments, as to assail others equally precious. In this century we have seen a revival of the Spartan theories which sacrificed the family to the state. Socialism and the *phalanstère*

have proposed to do by public organisation, with the force of law, what natural instinct teaches us to leave to domestic influences. It is therefore worthy of notice that, as the chosen nation is carefully traced by revelation back to a holy family, so the national festival did not ignore the family tie, but consecrated it. The feast was to be eaten "according to their fathers' houses"; if a family were too small, it was to the "neighbour next unto his house" that each should turn for co-operation; and the patriotic celebration was to live on from age to age by the instruction which parents should carefully give their children (xii. 3, 26, xiii. 8).

The first ordinance of the Jewish religion was a domestic service. And this arrangement is divinely wise. Never was a nation truly prosperous or permanently strong which did not cherish the sanctities of home. Ancient Rome failed to resist the barbarians, not because her discipline had degenerated, but because evil habits in the home had ruined her population. The same is notoriously true of at least one great nation to-day. History is the sieve of God, in which He continually severs the chaff from the grain of nations, preserving what is temperate and pure and calm, and therefore valorous and wise.

In studying the institution of the Passover, with its profound typical analogies, we must not overlook the simple and obvious fact that God built His nation upon families, and bade their great national institution draw the members of each home together.

The national character of the feast is shown further because no Egyptian family escaped the blow. Opportunities had been given to them to evade some of the previous plagues. When the hail was announced, "he

that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the house"; and this renders the national solidarity, the partnership even of the innocent in the penalties of a people's guilt, the 'community' of a nation, more apparent now. There was not a house where there was not one dead. The mixed multitude which came up with Israel came not because they had shared his exemptions, but because they dared not stay. It was an object-lesson given to Israel, which might have warned all his generations.

And if there is hideous vice in our own land to-day, or if the contrasts of poverty and wealth are so extreme that humanity is shocked by so much luxury insulting so much squalor,—if in any respect we feel that our own land, considering its supreme advantages, merits the wrath of God for its unworthiness,—then we have to fear and strive, not through public spirit alone, but as knowing that the chastisement of nations falls upon the corporate whole, upon us and upon our children.

But if the feast of the Passover was a commemoration, it also claims to be a sacrifice, and the first sacrifice which was Divinely founded and directed.

This brings us face to face with the great question, What is the doctrine which lies at the heart of the great institution of sacrifice?

We are not free to confine its meaning altogether to that which was visible at the time. This would contradict the whole doctrine of development, the intention of God that Christianity should blossom from the bud of Judaism, and the explicit assertion that the prophets were made aware that the full meaning and the date of what they uttered was reserved for the instruction of a later period (1 Peter i. 12).

But neither may we overlook the first palpable significance of any institution. Sacrifices never could have been devised to be a blind and empty pantomime to whole generations, for the benefit of their successors. Still less can one who believes in a genuine revelation to Moses suppose that their primary meaning was a false one, given in order that some truth might afterwards develop out of it.

What, then, might a pious and well-instructed Israelite discern beneath the surface of this institution?

To this question there have been many discordant answers, and the variance is by no means confined to unbelieving critics. Thus, a distinguished living expositor says in connection with the Paschal institution, "We speak not of blood as it is commonly understood, but of blood as the life, the love, the heart,—the whole quality of Deity." But it must be answered that Deity is the last suggestion which blood would convey to a Jewish mind: distinctly it is creature-life that it expresses; and the New Testament commentators make it plain that no other notion had even then evolved itself: they think of the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ, not of His Deity.* Neither of this feast, nor of that which the gospel of Jesus has evolved from it, can we find the solution by forgetting that the elements of the problem are, not deity, but a Body and Blood.

But when we approach the theories of rationalistic thinkers, we find a perfect chaos of rival speculations.

We are told that the Hebrew feasts were really agricultural—"Harvest festivals," and that the epithet Passover had its origin in the passage of the sun into Aries. But this great festival had a very secondary

* Though of course the Person Whose Body was thus offered is Divine (Acts xx. 28), and this gives inestimable value to the offering.

and subordinate connection with harvest (only the waving of a sheaf upon the second day) while the older calendar which was displaced to do it honour was truly agricultural, as may still be seen by the phrase, "The feast of ingathering *at the end of the year*, when thou gatherest in thy labours out of the field" (Exod. xxiii. 16).

In dealing with unbelief we must look at things from the unbelieving angle of vision. No sceptical theory has any right to invoke for its help a special and differentiating quality in Hebrew thought. Reject the supernatural, and the Jewish religion is only one among a number of similar creations of the mind of man "moving about in worlds unrecognised." And therefore we must ask, What notions of sacrifice were entertained, all around, when the Hebrew creed was forming itself?

Now, we read that "in the early days . . . a sacrifice was a meal. . . . Year after year, the return of vintage, corn-harvest, and sheep-shearing brought together the members of the household to eat and drink in the presence of Jehovah. . . . When an honoured guest arrives there is slaughtered for him a calf, not without an offering of the blood and fat to the Deity" (Wellhausen, *Israel*, p. 76). Of the sense of sin and propitiation "the ancient sacrifices present few traces. . . . An underlying reference of sacrifice to sin, speaking generally, was entirely absent. The ancient sacrifices were wholly of a joyous nature—a merry-making before Jehovah with music" (*ibid.*, p. 81).

We are at once confronted by the question, Where did the Jewish nation come by such a friendly conception of their deity? They had come out of Egypt, where human sacrifices were not rare. They had

settled in Palestine, where such idyllic notions must have been as strange as in modern Ashantee. And we are told that human sacrifices (such as that of Isaac and of Jephthah's daughter) belong to this older period (p. 69). Are *they* joyous and festive? are they not an endeavour, by the offering up of something precious, to reconcile a Being Who is estranged? With our knowledge of what existed in Israel in the period confessed to be historical, and of the meaning of sacrifices all around in the period supposed to be mythical, and with the admission that human sacrifices must be taken into account, it is startling to be asked to believe that Hebrew sacrifices, with all their solemn import and all their freight of Christian symbolism, were originally no more than a gift to the Deity of a part of some happy banquet.

It is quite plain that no such theory can be reconciled with the story of the first passover. And accordingly this is declared to be non-historical, and to have originated in the time of the later kings. The offering of the firstborn is only "the expression of thankfulness to the Deity for fruitful flocks and herds. If claim is also laid to the human firstborn, this is merely a later generalisation" (Wellhausen, p. 88).*

But this claim is by no means the only stumbling-block in the way of the theory, serious a stumbling-

* Here the sceptical theorists are widely divided among themselves. Kuenen has discussed this whole theory, and rejected it as "irreconcilable with what the Old Testament itself asserts in justification of this sacrifice." And he is driven to connect it with the notion of atonement. "Jahveh appears as a severe being who must be propitiated with sacrifices." He has therefore to introduce the notion of human sacrifice, in order to get rid of the connection with the penal death of the Egyptians, and of the miraculous, which this example would establish. (*Religion of Israel*, Eng. Trans., i., 239, 240.)

block though it be. How came the bright festival to be spoiled by bitter herbs and "bread of affliction"? Is it natural that a merry feast should grow more austere as time elapses? Do we not find it hard enough to prevent the most sacred festivals from reversing the supposed process, and degenerating into revels? And is not this the universal experience, from San Francisco to Bombay? Why was the mandate given to sprinkle the door of every house with blood, if the story originated after the feast had been centralised in Jerusalem, when, in fact, this precept had to be set aside as impracticable, their homes being at a distance? Why, again, were they bidden to slaughter the lamb "between the two evenings" (Exod. xii. 6)—that is to say, between sunset and the fading out of the light—unless the story was written long before such numbers had to be dealt with that the priests began to slaughter early in the afternoon, and continued until night? Why did the narrative set forth that every man might slaughter for his own house (a custom which still existed in the time of Hezekiah, when the Levites only slaughtered "the passovers" for those who were not ceremonially clean. 2 Chron. xxx. 17), if there were no stout and strong historical foundation for the older method?

Stranger still, why was the original command invented, that the lamb should be chosen and separated four days before the feast? There is no trace of any intention that this precept should apply to the first passover alone. It is somewhat unexpected there, interrupting the hurry and movement of the narrative with an interval of quiet expectation, not otherwise hinted at, which we comprehend and value when discovered, rather than anticipate in advance. It is

the very last circumstance which the Priestly Code would have invented, when the time which could be conveniently spent upon a pilgrimage was too brief to suffer the custom to be perpetuated. The selection of the lamb upon the tenth day, the slaying of it at home, the striking of the blood upon the door, and the use of hyssop, as in other sacrifices, with which to sprinkle it, whether upon door or altar; the eating of the feast standing, with staff in hand and girded loins; the application only to one day of the precept to eat no leavened bread, and the sharing in the feast by all, without regard to ceremonial defilement,—all these are cardinal differences between the first passover and later ones. Can we be blind to their significance? Even a drastic revision of the story, such as some have fancied, would certainly have expunged every divergence upon points so capital as these. Nor could any evidence of the antiquity of the institution be clearer than its existence in a form, the details of which have had to be so boldly modified under the pressure of the exigencies of the later time.

Taking, then, the narrative as it stands, we place ourselves by an effort of the historical imagination among those to whom Moses gave his instructions, and ask what emotions are excited as we listen.

Certainly no light and joyous feeling that we are going to celebrate a feast, and share our good things with our deity. Nay, but an alarmed surprise. Hitherto, among the admonitory and preliminary plagues of Egypt, Israel had enjoyed a painless and unbought exemption. The murrain had not slain their cattle, nor the locusts devoured their land, nor the darkness obscured their dwellings. Such admonitions they needed not. But now the judgment itself is im-

pending, and they learn that they, like the Egyptians whom they have begun to despise, are in danger from the destroying angel. The first paschal feast was eaten by no man with a light heart. Each listened for the rustling of awful wings, and grew cold, as under the eyes of the death which was, even then, scrutinising his lintels and his doorposts.

And this would set him thinking that even a gracious God, Who had "come down" to save him from his tyrants, discerned in him grave reasons for displeasure, since his acceptance, while others died, was not of course. His own conscience would then quickly tell him what some at least of those reasons were.

But he would also learn that the exemption which he did not possess by right (although a son of Abraham) he might obtain through grace. The goodness of God did not pronounce him safe, but it pointed out to him a way of salvation. He would scarcely observe, so entirely was it a matter of course, that this way must be of God's appointment and not of his own invention —that if he devised much more costly, elaborate and imposing ceremonies to replace those which Moses taught him, he would perish like any Egyptian who devised nothing, but simply cowered under the shadow of the impending doom.

Nor was the salvation without price. It was not a prayer nor a fast which bought it, but a life. The conviction that a redemption was necessary if God should be at once just and a justifier of the ungodly sprang neither from a later hairsplitting logic, nor from a methodising theological science; it really lay upon the very surface of this and every offering for sin, as distinguished from those offerings which expressed the gratitude of the accepted.

We have not far to search for evidence that the lamb was really regarded as a substitute and ransom. The assertion is part and parcel of the narrative itself. For, in commemoration of this deliverance, every firstborn of Israel, whether of man or beast, was set apart unto the Lord. The words are, "Thou shall cause to PASS OVER unto the Lord all that openeth the womb, and every firstling which thou hast that cometh of a beast; the males shall be the Lord's" (xiii. 12). What, then, should be done with the firstborn of a creature unfit for sacrifice? It should be replaced by a clean offering, and then it was said to be redeemed. Substitution or death was the inexorable rule. "Every firstborn of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb, and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break its neck." The meaning of this injunction is unmistakable. But it applies also to man: "All thy firstborn of man among thy sons thou shalt redeem." And when their sons should ask "What meaneth this?" they were to explain that when Pharaoh hardened himself against letting them go from Egypt, "the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land; . . . therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the womb being males; but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem" (xiii. 12-15).

Words could not more plainly assert that the lives of the firstborn of Israel were forfeited, that they were bought back by the substitution of another creature, which died instead, and that the transaction answered to the Passover ("thou shalt cause to pass over unto the Lord"). Presently the tribe of Levi was taken "instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel." But since there were two hundred and seventy-three of such firstborn children over and above the number of the Levites, it became necessary

to "redeem" these; and this was actually done by a cash payment of five shekels apiece. Of this payment the same phrase is used: it is "redemption-money"—the money wherewith the odd number of them is redeemed (Num. iii. 44-51).

The question at present is not whether modern taste approves of all this, or resents it: we are simply inquiring whether an ancient Jew was taught to think of the lamb as offered in his stead.

And now let it be observed that this idea has sunk deep into all the literature of Palestine. The Jews are not so much the beloved of Jehovah as His redeemed —"Thy people whom Thou hast redeemed" (1 Chron. xvii. 21). In fresh troubles the prayer is, "Redeem Israel, O Lord" (Ps. xxv. 22), and the same word is often used where we have ignored the allusion and rendered it "*Deliver* me because of mine enemies . . . *deliver* me from the oppression of men" (Ps. lxix. 18, cxix. 134). And the future troubles are to end in a deliverance of the same kind: "The *ransomed* of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion" (Isa. xxxv. 10, li. 11); and at the last "I will *ransom* them from the power of the grave" (Hos. xiii. 14). In all these places, the word is the same as in this narrative.

It is not too much to say that if modern theology were not affected by this ancient problem, if we regarded the creed of the Hebrews simply as we look at the mythologies of other peoples, there would be no more doubt that the early Jews believed in propitiatory sacrifice than that Phœnicians did. We should simply admire the purity, the absence of cruel and degrading accessories, with which this most perilous and yet humbling and admonitory doctrine was held in Israel.

The Christian applications of this doctrine must be considered along with the whole question of the typical character of the history. But it is not now premature to add, that even in the Old Testament there is abundant evidence that the types were semi-transparent, and behind them something greater was discerned, so that after it was written "Bring no more vain oblations," Isaiah could exclaim, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. When Thou shalt make His soul a trespass-offering He shall see His seed" (Isa. i. 13, liii. 6, 7, 10). And the full power of this last verse will only be felt when we remember the statement made elsewhere of the principle which underlay the sacrifices: "the life (*or* soul) of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life" (*or* "soul"—Lev. xvii. 11, R.V.) It is even startling to read the two verses together: "Thou shalt make His soul a trespass-offering;" "The blood maketh atonement by reason of the soul . . . the soul of the flesh is in the blood."*

It is still more impressive to remember that a Servant of Jehovah has actually arisen in Whom this doctrine has assumed a form acceptable to the best and holiest intellects and consciences of ages and civilisations widely remote from that in which it was conceived.

* The astonishing significance of this declaration would only be deepened if we accepted the theories now so fashionable, and believed that the later passage in Isaiah was the fruit of a period when the full-blown Priestly Code was in process of development out of "the small body of legislation contained in Lev. xvii.—xxvi." What a strange time for such a spiritual application of sacrificial language!

Another doctrine preached by the passover to every Jew was that he must be a worker together with God, must himself use what the Lord pointed out, and his own lintels and doorposts must openly exhibit the fact that he laid claim to the benefit of the institution of the Lord Jehovah's passover. With what strange feelings, upon the morrow, did the orphaned people of Egypt discover the stain of blood on the forsaken houses of all their emancipated slaves!

The lamb having been offered up to God, a new stage in the symbolism is entered upon. The body of the sacrifice, as well as the blood, is His: "Ye shall eat it in haste, it is the Lord's passover" (ver. 11). Instead of being a feast of theirs, which they share with Him, it is an offering of which, when the blood has been sprinkled on the doors, He permits His people, now accepted and favoured, to partake. They are His guests; and therefore He prescribes all the manner of their eating, the attitude so expressive of haste, and the unleavened "bread of affliction" and bitter herbs, which told that the object of this feast was not the indulgence of the flesh but the edification of the spirit, "a feast unto the Lord."

And in the strength of this meat they are launched upon their new career, freemen, pilgrims of God, from Egyptian bondage to a Promised Land.

It is now time to examine the chapter in more detail, and gather up such points as the preceding discussion has not reached.

(Ver. 1.) The opening words, "Jehovah spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt," have all the appearance of opening a separate document, and suggest, with certain other evidence, the notion of a

fragment written very shortly after the event, and afterwards incorporated into the present narrative. And they are, in the same degree, favourable to the authenticity of the book.

(Ver. 2.) The commandment to link their emancipation with a festival, and with the calendar, is the earliest example and the sufficient vindication of sacred festivals, which, even yet, some persons consider to be superstitious and judaical. But it is a strange doctrine that the Passover deserved honour better than Easter does, or that there is anything more servile and unchristian in celebrating the birth of all the hopes of all mankind than in commemorating one's own birth.

(Ver. 5.) The selection of a lamb for a sacrifice so quickly became universal, that there is no trace anywhere of the use of a kid in place of it. The alternative is therefore an indication of antiquity, while the qualities required—innocent youth and the absence of blemish, were sure to suggest a typical significance. For, if they were merely to enhance its value, why not choose a costlier animal?

Various meanings have been discovered in the four days during which it was reserved; but perhaps the true object was to give time for deliberation, for the solemnity and import of the institution to fill the minds of the people; time also for preparation, since the night itself was one of extreme haste, and prompt action can only be obtained by leisurely anticipation. We have Scriptural authority for applying it to the Antitype, Who also was foredoomed, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. xiii. 8).

But now it has to be observed that throughout the poetic literature the people is taught to think of itself

as a flock of sheep. "Thou leddest Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Ps. lxxvii. 20); "We are Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture" (Ps. lxxix. 13); "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isa. liii. 6); "Ye, O My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are men" (Ezek. xxxiv. 31); "The Lord of hosts hath visited His flock" (Zech. x. 3). All such language would make more easy the conception that what replaced the forfeited life was in some sense, figuratively, in the religious idea, a kindred victim. One who offered a lamb as his substitute sang "The Lord is my shepherd." "I have gone astray like a lost sheep" (Ps. xxiii. 1, cxix. 176).

(Ver. 3, 6.) Very instructive it is that this first sacrifice of Judaism could be offered by all the heads of houses. We have seen that the Levites were presently put into the place of the eldest son, but also that this function was exercised down to the time of Hezekiah by all who were ceremonially clean, whereas the opposite holds good, immediately afterwards, in the great passover of Josiah (2 Chron. xxx. 17, xxxv. 11).

It is impossible that this incongruity could be devised, for the sake of plausibility, in a narrative which rested on no solid basis. It goes far to establish what has been so anxiously denied—the reality of the centralised worship in the time of Hezekiah. And it also establishes the great doctrine that priesthood was held not by a superior caste, but on behalf of the whole nation, in whom it was theoretically vested, and for whom the priest acted, so that they were "a nation of priests."

(Ver. 8.) The use of unleavened bread is distinctly said to be in commemoration of their haste—"for thou

camest out of Egypt in haste" (Deut. xvi. 3)—but it does not follow that they were forced by haste to eat their bread unleavened at the first. It was quite as easy to prepare leavened bread as to provide the paschal lamb four days previously.

We may therefore seek for some further explanation, and this we find in the same verse in Deuteronomy, in the expression "bread of affliction." They were to receive the meat of passover with a reproachful sense of their unworthiness: humbly, with bread of affliction and with bitter herbs.

Moreover, we learn from St. Paul that unleavened bread represents simplicity and truth; and our Lord spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod (Mark viii. 15). And this is not only because leaven was supposed to be of the same nature as corruption. We ourselves always mean something unworthy when we speak of *mixed* motives, possible though it be to act from two motives, both of them high-minded. Now, leaven represents mixture in its most subtle and penetrating form.

The paschal feast did not express any such luxurious and sentimental religionism as finds in the story of the cross an easy joy, or even a delicate and pleasing stimulus for the softer emotions, "a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and playeth well on an instrument." No, it has vigour and nourishment for those who truly hunger, but its bread is unfermented, and it must be eaten with bitter herbs

(Ver. 9.) Many Jewish sacrifices were "sodden," but this had to be roast with fire. It may have been to represent suffering that this was enjoined. But it comes to us along with a command to consume all the flesh,

reserving none and rejecting none. Now, though boiling does not mutilate, it dissipates; a certain amount of tissue is lost, more is relaxed, and its cohesion rendered feeble; and so the duty of its complete reception is accentuated by the words "not sodden at all with water." Nor should it be a barbarous feast, such as many idolatries encouraged: true religion civilises; "eat not of it at all raw."

(Ver. 10.) Nor should any of it be left until the morning. At the first celebration, with a hasty exodus impending, this would have involved exposure to profanation. In later times it might have involved superstitious abuses. And therefore the same rule is laid down which the Church of England has carried on for the same reasons into the Communion feast—that all must be consumed. Nor can we fail to see an ideal fitness in the precept. Of the gift of God we may not select what gratifies our taste or commends itself to our desires; all is good; all must be accepted; a partial reception of His grace is no valid reception at all.

(Ver. 12.) In describing the coming wrath, we understand the inclusion equally of innocent and guilty men, because it is thus that all national vengeance operates; and we receive the benefits of corporate life at the cost, often heavy, of its penalties. The animal world also has to suffer with us; the whole creation groaneth together now, and all expects together the benefit of our adoption hereafter. But what were the judgments against the idols of Egypt, which this verse predicts, and another (Num. xxxiii. 4) declares to be accomplished? They doubtless consisted chiefly in the destruction of sacred animals, from the beetle and the frog to the holy ox of Apis—from the cat, the

monkey, and the dog, to the lion, the hippopotamus, and the crocodile. In their overthrow a blow was dealt which shook the whole system to its foundation; for how could the same confidence be felt in sacred images when all the sacred beasts had once been slain by a rival invisible Spiritual Being! And more is implied than that they should share the common desolation: the text says plainly, of men and beasts the firstborn must die, but all of these. The difference in the phrase is obvious and indisputable; and in its fulfilment all Egypt saw the act of a hostile and victorious deity.

(Ver. 13.) "And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are." That it was a token to the destroying angel we see plainly; but why *to them?* Is it enough to explain the assertion, with some, as meaning, upon their behalf? Rather let us say that the publicity, the exhibition upon their doorposts of the sacrifice offered within, was not to inform and guide the angel, but to edify the people. They should perform an open act of faith. Their houses should be visibly set apart. "With the mouth confession" (of faith) "is made unto salvation," unto that deliverance from a hundred evasions and equivocations, and as many inward doubts and hesitations, which comes when any decisive act is done, when the die is cast and the Rubicon crossed. A similar effect upon the mind, calming and steadying it, was produced when the Israelite carried out the blood of the lamb, and by sprinkling it upon the doorpost formally claimed his exemption, and returned with the consciousness that between him and the imminent death a visible barrier interposed itself.

Will any one deny that a similar help is offered to

us of the later Church in our many opportunities of avowing a fixed and personal belief? Whoever refuses to comply with an unholy custom because he belongs to Christ, whoever joins heartily in worship at the cost of making himself remarkable, whoever nerves himself to kneel at the Holy Table although he feels himself unworthy, that man has broken through many snares; he has gained assurance that his choice of God is a reality: he has shown his flag; and this public avowal is not only a sign to others, but also a token to himself.

But this is only half the doctrine of this action. What he should thus openly avow was his trust (as we have shown) in atoning blood.

And in the day of our peril what shall be our reliance? That our doors are trodden by orthodox visitants only? that the lintels are clean, and the inhabitants temperate and pure? or that the Blood of Christ has cleansed our conscience?

Therefore (ver. 22) the blood was sprinkled with hyssop, of which the light and elastic sprays were admirably suited for such use, but which was reserved in the Law for those sacrifices which expiated sin (Lev. xiv. 49; Num. xix. 18, 19). And therefore also none should go forth out of his house until the morning, for we are not to content ourselves with having once invoked the shelter of God: we are to abide under its protection while danger lasts.

And (ver. 23) upon the condition of this marking of their doorposts the Lord should *pass over* their houses. The phrase is noteworthy, because it recurs throughout the narrative, being employed nine times in this chapter; and because the same word is found in Isaiah, again in contrast with the ruin of others, and with an interesting

and beautiful expansion of the hovering poised notion which belongs to the word.*

Repeated commandments are given to parents to teach the meaning of this institution to their children, (xii. 26, xiii. 8). And there is something almost cynical in the notion of a later mythologist devising this appeal to a tradition which had no existence at all; enrolling, in support of his new institutions, the testimony (which had never been borne) of fathers who had never taught any story of the kind.

On the other hand, there is something idyllic and beautiful in the minute instruction given to the heads of families to teach their children, and in the simple words put into their mouths, "It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt." It carries us forward to these weary days when children scarcely see the face of one who goes out to labour before they are awake, and returns exhausted when their day is over, and who himself too often needs the most elementary instruction, these heartless days when the teaching of religion devolves, in thousands of families, upon the stranger who instructs, for one hour in the week, a class in Sunday-school. The contrast is not reassuring.

When all these instructions were given to Israel, the people bowed their heads and worshipped. The bones of most of them were doomed to whiten in the wilderness. They perished by serpents and by "the

* So that it is used equally of the slow action of the lame, and of the lingering movements of the false prophets when there was none to answer (2 Sam. iv. 4; 1 Kings xviii. 26). "The Lord of Hosts shall come down to fight upon Mount Zion. . . . As birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts protect Jerusalem; He will PASS OVER and preserve it" (Isa. xxxi. 4, 5).

destroyer"; they fell in one day three-and-twenty thousand, because they were discontented and rebellious and unholy. And yet they could adore the gracious Giver of promises and Slayer of foes. They would not obey, but they were quite ready to accept benefits, to experience deliverance, to become the favourites of heaven, to march to Palestine. So are too many fain to be made happy, to find peace, to taste the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, to go to heaven. But they will not take up a cross. They will murmur if the well is bitter, if they have no flesh but only angels' food, if the goodly land is defended by powerful enemies.

On these terms, they cannot be Christ's disciples.

It is apparently the mention of a mixed multitude, who came with Israel out of Egypt, which suggests the insertion, in a separate and dislocated paragraph, of the law of the passover concerning strangers (vers. 38, 43-49).

An alien was not to eat thereof: it belonged especially to the covenant people. But who was a stranger? A slave should be circumcised and eat thereof; for it was one of the benignant provisions of the law that there should not be added, to the many severities of his condition, any religious disabilities. The time would come when all nations should be blessed in the seed of Abraham. In that day the poor would receive a special beatitude; and in the meantime, as the first indication of catholicity beneath the surface of an exclusive ritual, it was announced, foremost among those who should be welcomed within the fold, that a slave should be circumcised and eat the passover.

And if a sojourner desired to eat thereof, he should

be mindful of his domestic obligations: all his males should be circumcised along with him, and then his disabilities were at an end. Surely we can see in these provisions the germ of the broader and more generous welcome which Christ offers to the world. Let it be added that this admission of strangers had been already implied at verse 19; while every form of coercion was prohibited by the words "a sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat of it," in verse 45.

THE TENTH PLAGUE.

xii. 29-36.

And now the blow fell. Infants grew cold in their mothers' arms; ripe statesmen and crafty priests lost breath as they reposed: the wisest, the strongest and the most hopeful of the nation were blotted out at once, for the firstborn of a population is its flower.

Pharaoh Menephtah had only reached the throne by the death of two elder brethren, and therefore history confirms the assertion that he "rose up," when the firstborn were dead; but it also justifies the statement that his firstborn died, for the gallant and promising youth who had reconquered for him his lost territories, and who actually shared his rule and "sat upon the throne," Menephtah Seti, is now shown to have died early, and never to have held an independent sceptre.

We can imagine the scene. Suspense and terror must have been wide spread; for the former plagues had given authority to the more dreadful threat, the fulfilment of which was now to be expected, since all negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh had been formally broken off.

Strange and confident movements and doubtless

menacing expressions among the Hebrews would also make this night a fearful one, and there was little rest for "those who feared the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh." These, knowing where the danger lay, would watch their firstborn well, and when the ashy change came suddenly upon a blooming face, and they raised the wild cry of Eastern bereavement, then others awoke to the same misery. From remote villages and lonely hamlets the clamour of great populations was echoed back; and when, under midnight skies in which the strong wind of the morrow was already moaning, the awestruck people rushed into their temples, there the corpses of their animal deities glared at them with glassy eyes.

Thus the cup which they had made their slaves to drink was put in larger measure to their own lips at last, and not infants only were snatched away, but sons around whom years of tenderness had woven stronger ties; and the loss of their bondsmen, from which they feared so much national weakness, had to be endured along with a far deadlier drain of their own life-blood. The universal wail was bitter, and hopeless, and full of terror even more than woe; for they said, "We be all dead men." Without the consolation of ministering by sick beds, or the romance and gallant excitement of war, "there was not a house where there was not one dead," and this is said to give sharpness to the statement that there was a great cry in Egypt.

Then came such a moment as the Hebrew temperament keenly enjoyed, when "the sons of them that oppressed them came bending unto them, and all they that despised them bowed themselves down at the soles of their feet." Pharaoh sent at midnight to surrender everything that could possibly be demanded, and in

his abject fear added, "and bless me also"; and the Egyptians were urgent on them to begone, and when they demanded the portable wealth of the land,—a poor ransom from a vanquished enemy, and a still poorer payment for generations of forced labour,—"the Lord gave them favour" (is there not a saturnine irony in the phrase?) "in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And they spoiled the Egyptians."

By this analogy St. Augustine defended the use of heathen learning in defence of Christian truth. Clogged by superstitions, he said, it contained also liberal instruction, and truths even concerning God—"gold and silver which they did not themselves create, but dug out of the mines of God's providence, and misapplied. These we should reclaim, and apply to Christian use" (*De Doct. Chr.*, 60, 61).

And the main lesson of the story lies so plainly upon the surface that one scarcely needs to state it. What God requires *must* ultimately be done; and human resistance, however stubborn and protracted, will only make the result more painful and more signal at the last.

Now, every concern of our obscure daily lives comes under this law as surely as the actions of a Pharaoh.

THE EXODUS.

xii. 37-42.

The children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. Already, at the outset of their journey, controversy has had much to say about their route. Much ingenuity has been expended upon the theory which brought their early journey along the Mediter-

ranean coast, and made the overthrow of the Egyptians take place in "that Serbonian bog where armies whole have sunk." But it may fairly be assumed that this view was refuted even before the recent identification of the sites of Rameses and Pihahiroth rendered it untenable.

How came these trampled slaves, who could not call their lives their own, to possess the cattle which we read of as having escaped the murrain, and the number of which is here said to have been very great?

Just before Moses returned, and when the Pharaoh of the Exodus appears upon the scene, we are told that "their cry came up unto God, . . . and God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant . . . and God saw the children of Israel, and God took knowledge of them" (ii. 23).

May not this verse point to something unrecorded, some event before their final deliverance? The conjecture is a happy one that it refers to their share in the revolt of subject races which drove Menephtah for twelve years out of his northern territories. If so, there was time for a considerable return of prosperity; and the retention or forfeiture of their chattels when they were reconquered would depend very greatly upon circumstances unknown to us. At all events, this revolt is evidence, which is amply corroborated by history and the inscriptions, of the existence of just such a discontented and servile element in the population as the "mixed multitude" which came out with them repeatedly proved itself to be.

But here we come upon a problem of another kind. How long was Israel in the house of bondage? Can we rely upon the present Hebrew text, which says that "their sojourning which they sojourned in Egypt, was

four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord came out of the land of Egypt" (xii. 40, 41).

Certain ancient versions have departed from this text. The Septuagint reads, "The sojourning of the children of Israel which they sojourned in Egypt and *in the land of Canaan*, was four hundred and thirty years"; and the Samaritan agrees with this, except that it has "the sojourning of the children of Israel and *of their fathers*." The question is, which reading is correct? Must we date the four hundred and thirty years from Abraham's arrival in Canaan, or from Jacob's descent into Egypt?

For the shorter period there are two strong arguments. The genealogies in the Pentateuch range from four persons to six between Jacob and the Exodus, which number is quite unable to reach over four centuries. And St. Paul says of the covenant with Abraham that the law which came four hundred and thirty years after" (*i.e.* after the time of Abraham) "could not disannul it" (Gal. iii. 17).

This reference by St. Paul is not so decisive as it may appear, because he habitually quotes the Septuagint, even where he must have known that it deviates from the Hebrew, provided that the deviation does not compromise the matter in hand. Here, he was in nowise concerned with the chronology, and had no reason to perplex a Gentile church by correcting it. But it was a different matter with St. Stephen, arguing his case before the Hebrew council. And he quotes plainly and confidently the prediction that the seed of Abraham should be four hundred years in bondage, and that one nation should entreat them evil four

hundred years (Acts vii. 6). Again, this is the clear intention of the words in Genesis (xv. 13). And as to the genealogies, we know them to have been cut down, so that seven names are omitted from that of Ezra, and three at least from that of our Lord Himself. Certainly when we consider the great population implied in an army of six hundred thousand adult men, we must admit that the longer period is inherently the more probable of the two. But we can only assert with confidence that just when their deliverance was due it was accomplished, and they who had come down a handful, and whom cruel oppression had striven to decimate, came forth, no undisciplined mob, but armies moving in organised and regulated detachments: "the Lord did bring the children of Israel forth by their hosts" (ver. 51). "And the children of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt" (xiii. 18).

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAW OF THE FIRSTBORN.

xiii. 1.

MUCH that was said in the twelfth chapter is repeated in the thirteenth. And this repetition is clearly due to a formal rehearsal, made when all "their hosts" had mustered in Succoth after their first march; for Moses says, "Remember this day, in which ye came out" (ver. 3). Already it had been spoken of as a day much to be remembered, and for its perpetuation the ordinance of the Passover had been founded.

But now this charge is given as a fit prologue for the remarkable institution which follows—the consecration to God of all unblemished males who are the firstborn of their mothers—for such is the full statement of what is claimed.

In speaking to Moses the Lord says, "Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn . . . it is Mine." But Moses addressing the people advances gradually, and almost diplomatically. First he reminds them of their deliverance, and in so doing he employs a phrase which could only have been used at the exact stage when they were emancited and yet upon Egyptian soil: "By strength of nd the Lord brought you out *from this place*" (ver. 3). en he charges them not to forget their rescue, in the ngerous time of their prosperity, when the Lord

shall have brought them into the land which He swore to give them; and he repeats the ordinance of unleavened bread. And it is only then that he proceeds to announce the permanent consecration of all their firstborn—the abiding doctrine that these, who naturally represent the nation, are for its unworthiness forfeited, and yet by the grace of God redeemed.

God, Who gave all and pardons all, demands a return, not as a tax which is levied for its own sake, but as a confession of dependence, and like the silk flag presented to the sovereign, on the anniversaries of the two greatest of English victories, by the descendants of the conquerors, who hold their estates upon that tenure. The firstborn, thus dedicated, should have formed a sacred class, a powerful element in Hebrew life enlisted on the side of God.

For these, as we have already seen, the Levites were afterwards substituted (Num. iii. 44), and there is perhaps some allusion to this change in the direction that "all the firstborn of man thou shalt redeem" (ver. 13). But yet the demand is stated too broadly and imperatively to belong to that later modification: it suits exactly the time to which it is attributed, before the tribe of Levi was substituted for the firstborn of all.

"They are Mine," said Jehovah, Who needed not, that night, to remind them what He had wrought the night before. It is for precisely the same reason, that St. Paul claims all souls for God: "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your bodies and with your spirits, which are God's."

And besides the general claim upon us all, each of us should feel, like the firstborn, that every special

mercy is a call to special gratitude, to more earnest dedication. "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice" (Rom. xii. 1).

There is a tone of exultant confidence in the words of Moses, very interesting and curious. He and his nation are breathing the free air at last. The deliverance that has been given makes all the promise that remains secure. As one who feels his pardon will surely not despair of heaven, so Moses twice over instructs the people what to do when God shall have kept the oath which He swore, and brought them into Canaan, into the land flowing with milk and honey. Then they must observe His passover. Then they must consecrate their firstborn.

And twice over this emancipator and law-giver, in the first flush of his success, impresses upon them the homely duty of teaching their households what God had done for them (vers. 8, 14; cf. xii. 26).

This, accordingly, the Psalmist learned, and in his turn transmitted. He heard with his ears and his fathers told him what God did in their days, in the days of old. And he told the generation to come the praises of Jehovah, and His strength, and His wondrous works (Ps. xliv. 1, lxxviii. 4).

But it is absurd to treat these verses, as Kuenen does, as evidence that the story is mere legend: "transmitted from mouth to mouth, it gradually lost its accuracy and precision, and adopted all sorts of foreign elements." To prove which, we are gravely referred to passages like this. (*Religion of Israel*, i. 22, Eng. Vers.) The duty of oral instruction is still acknowledged, but this does not prove that the narrative is still unwritten.

From the emphatic language in which Moses urged this double duty, too much forgotten still, of remembering and showing forth the goodness of God, sprang the curious custom of the wearing of phylacteries. But the Jews were not bidden to wear signs and frontlets: they were bidden to let hallowed memories be unto them in the place of such charms as they had seen the Egyptians wear, "for a sign unto thee, upon thine hand, and for a frontlet between thine eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in thy mouth" (ver. 9). Such language is frequent in the Old Testament, where mercy and truth should be bound around their necks; their fathers' commandments should be tied around their necks, bound on their fingers, written on their hearts; and Sion should clothe herself with her converts as an ornament, and gird them upon her as a bride doth (Prov. iii. 3, vi. 21, vii. 3; Isa. xlix. 18).

But human nature still finds the letter of many a commandment easier than the spirit, a ceremony than an obedient heart, penance than penitence, ashes on the forehead than a contrite spirit, and a phylactery than the gratitude and acknowledgment which ought to be unto us for a sign on the hand and a frontlet between the eyes.

We have already observed the connection between the thirteenth verse and the events of the previous night. But there is an interesting touch of nature in the words "the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb." It was afterwards rightly perceived that all unclean animals should follow the same rule; but why was only the ass mentioned? Plainly because those humble journeyers had no other beast of burden. Horses pursued them presently, but even the Egyptians of that period used them only in war. The trampled

Hebrews would not possess camels. And thus again, in the tenth commandment, when the stateliest of their cattle is specified, no beast of burden is named with it but the ass: "Thou shalt not covet . . . his ox nor his ass." It is an undesigned coincidence of real value; a phrase which would never have been devised by legislators of a later date; a frank and unconscious evidence of the genuineness of the story.

Some time before this, a new and fierce race, whose name declared them to be "emigrants," had thrust itself in among the tribes of Canaan—a race which was long to wage equal war with Israel, and not seldom to see his back turned in battle. They now held all the south of Palestine, from the brook of Egypt to Ekron (Josh. xv. 4, 47). And if Moses in the flush of his success had pushed on by the straight and easy route into the promised land, the first shock of combat with them would have been felt in a few weeks. But "God led them not by the way of the Philistines, though that was near, for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent them when they see war, and they return to Egypt" (ver. 17).

From this we learn two lessons. Why did not He, Who presently made strong the hearts of the Egyptians to plunge into the bed of the sea, make the hearts of His own people strong to defy the Philistines? The answer is a striking and solemn one. Neither God in the Old Testament, nor God manifested in the flesh, is ever recorded to have wrought any miracle of spiritual advancement or overthrow. Thus the Egyptians were but confirmed in their own choice: their decision was carried further. And even Saul of Tarsus was illuminated, not coerced: he might have disobeyed the heavenly vision. He was not an insincere man

suddenly coerced into earnestness, nor a coward suddenly made brave. In the moral world, adequate means are always employed for the securing of desired effects. Love, gratitude, the sense of danger and of grace, are the powers which elevate characters. And persons who live in sensuality, fraud, or falsehood, hoping to be saved some day by a sort of miracle of grace, ought to ponder this truth, which may not be the gospel now fashionable, but is unquestionably the statement of a Scriptural fact: *in the moral sphere, God works by means and not by miracle.*

A free life, the desert air, the rejection of the unfit by many visitations, and the growth of a new generation amid thrilling events, in a soul-stirring region, and under the pure influences of the law,—these were necessary before Israel could cross steel with the warlike children of the Philistines; and even then, it was not with them that he should begin.

The other lesson we learn is the tender fidelity of God, Who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear. He led them aside into the desert, whither He still in mercy leads very many who think it a heavy judgment to be there.

THE BONES OF JOSEPH.

xiii. 19.

It is certain that Moses, in the days of his greatness, must often have mused by the sepulchre of the one Israelite before himself who held high rank in Egypt. The knowledge that Joseph's elevation was providential must have helped him at that time, now many years ago, to think rightly of his own. And now we read that Moses took the bones of Joseph with him. In

the Epistle to the Hebrews (xi. 22) it is recorded as the most characteristic example of the faith of the patriarch, that instead of desiring to be carried, like his father, at once to Canaan, he made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones. To him Egypt was no longer an alien land. There only he had known honour without envy, and happiness without betrayal. There his bones could rest in quiet; but not for ever. Personal elevation, which had not rent the cord between him and his unworthy family, could still less sever the bands between him and the sacred race. Let him sleep in Egypt while his grave there was honoured: let the remembrance of him be kept fresh, to protect awhile his kindred; and when the predicted days of evil came, let his ashes share the neglect and dishonour of his people, if only they would remember his remains when the Lord would lead them forth. This confidence in their emancipation was his faith—which meant, here as always, not a clear view of truth, but an assuring grasp of it. He had straitly sworn the children of Israel saying, "God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you."

Many a Christian might well envy a confidence so practical, so thoroughly realised, entering so naturally into the tissue of his thoughts and calculations. And their actual remembrance of him goes to show that the tradition of his faith had never completely died out, but was among the influences which kept alive the nation's hope.

And as the people bore his honoured ashes through the desert, these being dead spoke of bygone times, they linked the present and the past together, they deepened the national consciousness that Israel was

a favoured people, called to no common destiny, sustained by no common promises, pressing toward no common goal.

If Israel had been wise, they would have thought of him, the Israelite in heart, though glittering in the splendours of Egypt; and would have considered well that as little as men detected his secret life from his appearance, so little could theirs be judged. To the eye, they were free from the foreign trammels in which he was seemingly entangled, yet many of them in heart turned back to all which strove in vain to bind his affections down. The lesson holds good to-day. Many a modern religionist looks askance at the "worldliness" of high office and rank and state; little dreaming that the "world" he censures is strong in his own ambitious and self-asserting spirit, and is overcome by the gentle and tranquil spirit of hundreds of those whom he condemns.

Bearing this hallowed burden, which might easily have become an object of superstitious regard, the nation moved from Succoth to Etham on the edge of the wilderness. And with them a Presence moved which rebuked all others, however venerable. The Lord went before them. It has already been pointed out that throughout the early history of this nation, just come out of an idolatrous land, and too ready to lapse back into superstition, God never reveals Himself except in fire. To Abraham and to Jacob He appeared in human form, and again to Joshua; but in the interval, never. So now they see Him by day in a pillar of cloud to guide them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light. The glory of the nation was that manifested Presence, lacking which, Moses besought Him to carry them up no farther.

Nothing in the Exodus is more impressive, and it sank deep into the national heart. Many centuries afterwards, the ideal of a golden age was that the Lord should "create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud of smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night" (Isa. iv. 5).

But it has been well observed that, amid the various allusions to it in Hebrew poetry, not one treats it as modern literature has done, with an eye to its marvellous sublimity and picturesque effects:

> "By day, along the astonished lands
> The cloudy pillar glided slow:
> By night, Arabia's crimsoned sands
> Returned the fiery column's glow."

The Hebrew poetry is vivid and passionate, but all its concerns are human or divine—God, and the life of man. It is not artistic, but inspired. "The modern poet is delighting in the scenic effect; the ancient chronicler was wholly occupied with the overshadowing power of God."*

* Hutton's *Essays*, Vol. ii., *Literary*: *The Poetry of the Old Test.*

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RED SEA.

xiv. 1-31.

IT would seem that the Israelites recoiled before a frontier fortress of Egypt at Khetam (Etham). This is probable, whatever theory of the route of the Exodus one may adopt; and it is still open to every reader to adopt almost any theory he pleases, provided that two facts are borne in mind: viz., first, that the narrative certainly means to describe a miraculous interference, not superseding the forces of nature, but wielding them in a fashion impossible to man; and second, that the phrase translated "Red Sea"* (xiii. 18, xv. 4) is the same which is confessed by all persons to have that meaning in chap. xxiii. 31, and in Numbers xxi. 4 and xxxiii. 10.

Checked, without loss or with it, they were bidden to "turn back," and encamp at Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. And since Migdol is simply a watch-tower (there were several in the Holy Land, including that which gave her name to Mary Magdal-ene), we are to infer that from thence their inexplicable

* The Sea of Zuph, or reeds, the word being used of the reeds in which Moses was laid by his mother and found by Pharaoh's daughter (ii. 3, 5), rendered "flags" in the Revised Version.

movements were signalled back to Pharaoh. It was the natural signal for all the wild passions of a baffled and half-ruined tyrant to leap into flame. We are scarcely able to imagine the mental condition of men who conceived that a God Who had dealt out death and destruction might be far from invincible from another side. But ages after this, a campaign was planned upon the ingenious theory that "Jehovah is a god of the hills but He is not a god of the valleys" (1 Kings xx. 28); and plenty of people who would scorn this simple notion are still of opinion that He is a God of eternity and can save them from hell, but a little falsehood and knavery are much better able to save them from want in the meanwhile. Nay, there are many excellent persons who are not at all of opinion that the prince of this world has been dethroned.

Therefore, when his enemies recoiled from his fortresses and wandered away into the wilderness of Egypt, entangling themselves hopelessly between the sea, the mountains, and his own strongholds, it might well appear to Pharaoh that Jehovah was not a warlike deity, that he himself had now found out the weak point of his enemies, and could pursue and overtake and satisfy his lust upon them. There is a significant emphasis in the song of Miriam's triumph—"Jehovah is a man of war." At all events, it was through an imperfect sense of the universal and practical importance of Jehovah as a factor not to be neglected in his calculations, through exactly the same error which misleads every man who postpones religion, or limits the range of its influence in his daily life,—it was thus, and not through any rarer infatuation, that Pharaoh made ready six hundred chosen chariots and all the chariots

of Egypt, and captains over all of them. And his court was of the same mind, saying, "What is this that we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"

These words are hard to reconcile with the strange notion that until now a return after three days was expected, despite the torrent of blood which rolled between them, and the demands by which the Israelitish women had spoiled the Egyptians. Upon this theory it is not their own error, but the bad faith of their servants, which they should have cried out against.

At the sight of the army, a panic seized the servile hearts of the fugitives. First they cried out unto the Lord. But how possible it is, without any real faith, to address to Heaven the mere clamours of our alarm, and to mistake natural agitation for earnestness in prayer, we learn by the reproaches with which, after thus crying to the Lord, they assailed His servant. Were there no graves in that land of superb sepulchres —that land, now, of universal mourning? Would God that they had perished with the firstborn! Why had they been treated thus? Had they not urged Moses to let them alone, that they might serve the Egyptians?

And yet these men had lately, for the very promise of so much emancipation as they now enjoyed, bowed their heads in adoring thankfulness. As it was their fear which now took the form of supplication, so then it was their hope which took the form of praise. And we, how shall we know whether that in us which seems to be religious gladness and religious grief, is mere emotion, or is truly sacred? By watching whether worship and love continue, when emotion has

spent its force, or has gone round, like the wind, to another quarter.

How did Moses feel when this outcry told him of the unworthiness and cowardice of the nation of his heart? Much as we feel, perhaps, when we see the frailties and failures of converts in the mission-field, and the lapse of the intemperate who have seemed to be reclaimed for ever. We thought that perfection was to be reached at a bound. Now we think that the whole work was unreal. Both extremes are wrong: we have much to learn from the failures of that ancient church, in which was the germ of hero, psalmist, and prophet, which was indeed the church in the wilderness, and whose many relapses were so tenderly borne with by God and His messenger.

The settled faith of Moses, and the assurances which he could give the agitated people,* contrast nobly with their alarm. But his confidence also had its secret springs in prayer, for the Lord said to him, "Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."

The words are remarkable on two accounts. Can prayer ever be out of place? Not if we mean a prayerful dependent mental attitude toward God. But certainly, yes, if God has already revealed that for which we still importune Him, and we are secretly

* But his assurance is, "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." When Wellhausen would summarise the work of Moses, he tells us that "he taught them to regard self-assertion against the Egyptians as an article of religion" (*History*, p. 430). It would be impossible, within the compass of so many words, more completely to miss the remarkable characteristic which differentiates this whole narrative from all other revolutionary movements. Expectancy and dependence here take the place of "self-assertion."

disquieted lest His promise should fail. It is misplaced if our own duty has to be done, and we pass the golden moments in inactivity, however pious. Christ spoke of men who should leave their gift before the altar, unpresented, because of a neglected duty which should be discharged. And perhaps there are men who pray for the conversion of the heathen, or of friends at home, to whom God says, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? because their money and their faithful efforts must be given, as Moses must arouse himself to lead the people forward, and to stretch his wand over the sea.

And again the forces of nature are on the side of God: the strong wind makes the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over. History has no scene more picturesque than this wild night march, in the roar of tempest, amid the flying foam which "baptized" them unto Moses,* while the glimmering waters stood up like a rampart to protect their flanks; the full moon of passover above them, shown and hidden as the swift clouds raced before the storm, while high and steadfast overhead, unshaken by the fiercest blast, illumined by a mysterious splendour, "stood" the vast cloud which veiled like a curtain their whole host from the pursuer. This it was, and the experience of such protection that the Egyptians, overawed, came not near them, which gave them courage to enter the bed of the sea; and as they trod the strange road they found that not only were the waters driven off the surface, but the sands were left firm to traverse.

But when the blind fury of Pharaoh, "hardened"

* Not the adults only; nor yet by immersion, whether in the rain-cloud or the surf.

against everything but the sense that his prey was escaping, sent his army along the same track, and this after long delay, at a crisis when every moment was priceless, then a new element of terrible sublimity was added. Through the pillar of cloud and fire Jehovah looked forth on the Egyptian host, as they pressed on behind, unable to penetrate the supernatural gloom, cold fear creeping into every heart, while the chariot wheels laboured heavily in the wet sand. In that direful vision at last the question was answered, "Who is Jehovah, that I should let His people go?" Now it was the turn of those who said "Israel is entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in," themselves to be taken in a worse net. For at that awful gaze the iron curb of military discipline gave way; their labouring chariots, the pride and defence of the nation, were forsaken; and a wild cry broke out, "Let us fly from the face of Israel, for Jehovah"—He who plagued us—"fighteth for them against the Egyptians." But their humiliation came too late,—for in the morning watch, at a natural time for atmospheric changes, but in obedience to the rod of Moses, the furious wind veered or fell, and the sea returned to its accustomed limits; and first, as the sands beneath became saturated, the chariots were overturned and the mail-clad charioteers went down "like lead," and then the hissing line of foam raced forward and closed around and over the shrieking mob which was the pride and strength of Egypt only an hour before.

But, as the story repeats twice over, with a very natural and glad reiteration, "the children of Israel walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (ver. 29, cf. 22).

ON THE SHORE.

xiv. 30, 31.

After the haste and agitation of their marvellous deliverance the children of Israel seem to have halted for awhile at the only spot in the neighbourhood where there is water, known as the Ayoun Musa or springs of Moses to this day. There they doubtless brought into some permanent shape their rudimentary organisation. There, too, their impressions were given time to deepen. They "saw the Egyptians dead on the sea-shore," and realised that their oppression was indeed at an end, their chains broken, themselves introduced into a new life,—"baptized unto Moses." They reflected upon the difference between all other deities and the God of their fathers, Who, in that deadly crisis, had looked upon them and their tyrants out of the fiery pillar. "They feared Jehovah, and they believed in Jehovah and in His servant Moses."

"They believed in Jehovah." This expression is noteworthy, because they had all believed in Him already. "By faith 'they' forsook Egypt. By faith 'they' kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood. By faith 'they' passed through the Red Sea." But their former trust was poor and wavering compared with that which filled their bosoms now. So the disciples followed Jesus because they believed on Him; yet when His first miracle manifested forth His glory, "His disciples believed on Him there." And again they said, "By this we believe that Thou camest forth from God." And after the resurrection He said, "Because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed" (John ii. 11, xvi. 30, xx. 29). Faith needs to be edified

by successive experiences, as the enthusiasm of a recruit is converted into the disciplined valour of the veteran. From each new crisis of the spiritual life the soul should obtain new powers. And that is a shallow and unstable religion which is content with the level of its initial act of faith (however genuine and however important), and seeks not to go from strength to strength.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SONG OF MOSES.

xv. 1-22.

DURING this halt they prepared that great song of triumph which St. John heard sung by them who had been victorious over the beast, standing by the sea of glass, having the harps of God. For by that calmer sea, triumphant over a deadlier persecution, they still found their adoration and joy expressed in this earliest chant of sacred victory. Because all holy hearts give like thanks to Him Who sitteth upon the throne, therefore "deep answers unto deep," and every great crisis in the history of the Church has legacies for all time and for eternity; and therefore the triumphant song of Moses the servant of God enriches the worship of heaven, as the penitence and hope and joy of David enrich the worship of the Church on earth (Rev. xv. 3).

Like all great poetry, this song is best enjoyed when it is neither commented upon nor paraphrased, but carefully read and warmly felt. There are circumstances and lines of thought which it is desirable to point out, but only as a preparation, not a substitute, for the submission of a docile mind to the influence of the inspired poem itself. It is unquestionably archaic. The parallelism of Hebrew verse is already here, but the structure is more free and unartificial than that of later poetry; and many ancient words, and words of

Egyptian derivation, authenticate its origin. So does the description of Miriam, in the fifteenth verse, as "the prophetess, the sister of Aaron." In what later time would she not rather have been called the sister of Moses? But from the lonely youth who found Aaron and Miriam together as often as he stole from the palace to his real home—the lonely man who regained both together when he returned from forty years of exile, and who sometimes found them united in opposition to his authority (Num. xii. 1, 2)—from Moses alone the epithet is entirely natural.

It is also noteworthy that Philistia is mentioned first among the foes who shall be terrified (ver. 14, R.V.), because Moses still expected the invasion to break first on them. But the unbelieving fears of Israel changed the route, so that no later poet would have set them in the forefront of his song. Thus also the terror of the Edomites is anticipated, although in fact they sturdily refused a passage to Israel through their land (Num. xx. 20). All this authenticates the song, which thereupon establishes the miraculous deliverance that inspired it.

The song is divided into two parts. Up to the end of the twelfth verse it is historical: the remainder expresses the high hopes inspired by this great experience. Nothing now seems impossible: the fiercest tribes of Palestine and the desert may be despised, for their own terror will suffice to "melt" them; and Israel may already reckon itself to be guided into the holy habitation (ver. 13).

The former part is again subdivided, by a noble and instinctive art, into two very unequal sections. With amplitude of triumphant adoration, the first ten verses tell the same story which the eleventh and twelfth

compress into epigrammatical vigour and terseness. To appreciate the power of the composition, one should read the fourth, fifth, and sixth verses, and turn immediately to the twelfth.

Each of these three divisions closes in praise, and as in the "Israel in Egypt," it was probably at these points that the voices of Miriam and the women broke in, repeating the first verse of the ode as a refrain (vers. 1 and 21). It is the earliest recognition of the place of women in public worship. And it leads us to remark that the whole service was responsive. Moses and the men are answered by Miriam and the women, bearing timbrels in their hands; for although instrumental music had been sorely misused in Egypt, that was no reason why it should be excluded now. Those who condemn the use of instruments in Christian worship virtually contend that Jesus has, in this respect, narrowed the liberty of the Church, and that a potent method of expression, known to man, must not be consecrated to the honour of God. And they make the present time unlike the past, and also unlike what is revealed of the future state.

Moreover there was movement, as in very many ancient religious services, within and without the pale of revelation.* Such dances were generally slow and graceful; yet the motion and the clang of metal, and the vast multitudes congregated, must be taken into account, if we would realise the strange enthusiasm of the emancipated host, looking over the blue sea to Egypt, defeated and twice bereaved, and forward to the desert wilds of freedom.

* There is no warrant in the use of Scripture for Stanley's assertion that the word translated "dances" should be rendered "guitars." (Smith's *Dict. of Bible*, Article *Miriam*.)

The poem is steeped in a sense of gratitude. In the great deliverance man has borne no part. It is Jehovah Who has triumphed gloriously, and cast the horse and charioteer—there was no "rider"— into the sea. And this is repeated again and again by the women as their response, in the deepening passion of the ode. "With the breath of His nostrils the waters were piled up. . . He blew with His wind and the sea covered them." And such is indeed the only possible explanation of the Exodus, so that whoever rejects the miracle is beset with countless difficulties. One of these is the fact that Moses, their immortal leader, has no martial renown whatever. Hebrew poetry is well able to combine gratitude to God with honour to the men of Zebulun who jeopardised their lives unto the death, to Jael who put her hand to the nail, to Saul and Jonathan who were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions. Joshua and David can win fame without dishonour to God. Why is it that here alone no mention is made of human agency, except that, in fact, at the outset of their national existence, they were shown, once for all, the direct interposition of their God?

From gratitude springs trust: the great lesson is learned that man has an interest in the Divine power. "My strength and song is Jah," says the second verse, using that abbreviated form of the covenant name Jehovah, which David also frequently associated with his victories. "And He is become my salvation." It is the same word as when, a little while ago, the trembling people were bidden to stand still and see the salvation of God. They have seen it now. Now they give the word Salvation for the first time to the Lord as an appellation, and as such it is destined to

endure. The Psalmist learns to call Him so, not only when he reproduces this verse word for word (Ps. cxviii. 14), but also when he says, "He only is my rock and my salvation" (lxii. 2), and prays, "Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, come for salvation to us" (lxxx. 2).

And the same title is known also to Isaiah, who says, "Behold God is my salvation," and "Be Thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble" (Isa. xii. 2, xxxiii. 2).

The progress is natural from experience of goodness to appropriation: He has helped me: He gives Himself to me; and from that again to love and trust, for He has always been the same: "my father," not my ancestors in general, but he whom I knew best and remember most tenderly, found Him the same Helper. And then love prompts to some return. My goodness extendeth not to Him, yet my voice can honour Him; I will praise Him, I will exalt His name. Now, this is the very spirit of evangelical obedience, the life-blood of the new dispensation racing in the veins of the old.

Where praise and exaltation are a spontaneous instinct, there is loyal service and every good work, not rendered by a hireling but a child. Had He not said, "Israel is My son"?

From exultant gratitude and trust, what is next to spring? That which is reproachfully called anthropomorphism, something which indeed easily degenerates into unworthy notions of a God limited by such restraints or warped by such passions as our own, yet which is after all a great advance towards true and holy thoughts of Him Who made man after His image and in His likeness.

Human affection cannot go forth to God without

believing that like affection meets and responds to it. If He is indeed the best and purest, we must think of Him as sharing all that is best and purest in our souls, all that we owe to His inspiring Spirit.

> "So through the thunder comes a human voice,
> Saying 'O heart I made, a heart beats here.'"

If ever any religion was sternly jealous of the Divine prerogatives, profoundly conscious of the incommunicable dignity of the Lord our God Who is one Lord, it was the Jewish religion. Yet when Jesus was charged with making Himself God, He could appeal to the doctrine of their own Scripture—that the judges of the people exercised so divine a function, and could claim such divine support, that God Himself spoke through them, and found representatives in them. "Is it not written in your law, I said Ye are gods?" (John x. 34). Not in vain did He appeal to such scriptures—and there are many such—to vindicate His doctrine. For man is never lifted above himself, but God in the same degree stoops towards us, and identifies Himself with us and our concerns. Who then shall limit His condescension? What ground in reason or revelation can be taken up for denying that it may be perfect, that it may develop into a permanent union of God with the creature whom He inspired with His own breath? It is by such steps that the Old Testament prepared Israel for the Incarnation. Since the Incarnation we have actually needed help from the other side, to prevent us from humanising our conceptions over-much. And this has been provided in the ever-expanding views of His creation given to us by science, which tell us that if He draws nigh to us it is from heights formerly undreamed of. Now, such

a step as we have been considering is taken unawares in the bold phrase "Jehovah is a man of war." For in the original, as in the English, this includes the assertion "Jehovah is a man." Of course it is only a bold figure. But such a figure prepares the mind for new light, suggesting more than it logically asserts.

The phrase is more striking when we remember that remarkable peculiarity of the Exodus and its revelations which has been already pointed out. Elsewhere God appears in human likeness. To Abraham it was so, just before, and to Manoah soon afterwards. Ezekiel saw upon the likeness of the throne the likeness of the appearance of a man (Ezek. i. 26). But Israel saw no similitude, only he heard a voice. This was obviously a safeguard against idolatry. And it makes the words more noteworthy, "Jehovah is a man of war," marching with us, our champion, into the battle. And we know Him as our fathers knew Him not,—"Jehovah is His name."

The poem next describes the overthrow of the enemy: the heavy plunge of men in armour into the deeps, the arm of the Lord dashing them in pieces, His "fire" consuming them, while the blast of His nostrils is the storm which "piles up" the waters, solid as a wall of ice, "congealed in the heart of the sea." Then the singers exultantly rehearse the short panting eager phrases, full of greedy expectation, of the enemy breathless in pursuit—a passage well remembered by Deborah, when her triumphant song closed by an insulting repetition of the vain calculations of the mother of Sisera and "her wise ladies."

The eleventh verse is remarkable as being the first announcement of the holiness of God. "Who is like

unto Thee, glorious in holiness?" And what does holiness mean? The Hebrew word is apparently suggestive of "brightness," and the two ideas are coupled by Isaiah (x. 17): "The Light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame." There is indeed something in the purity of light, in its absolute immunity from stain—no passive cleanness, as of the sand upon the shore, but intense and vital—and in its remoteness from the conditions of common material substances, that well expresses and typifies the lofty and awful quality which separates holiness from mere virtue. "God is called the Holy One because He is altogether pure, the clear and spotless Light; so that in the idea of the holiness of God there are embodied the absolute moral purity and perfection of the Divine nature, and His unclouded glory (Keil, *Pent.*, ii. 99). In this thought there is already involved separation, a lofty remoteness.

And when holiness is attributed to man, it never means innocence, nor even virtue, merely as such. It is always a derived attribute: it is reflected upon us, like light upon our planet; and like consecration, it speaks not of man in himself, but in his relation to God. It expresses a kind of separation to God, and thus it can reach to lifeless things which bear a true relation to the Divine. The seventh day is thus "hallowed." It is the very name of the "Holy Place," the "Sanctuary." And the ground where Moses was to stand unshod beside the burning bush was pronounced "holy," not by any concession to human weakness, but by the direct teaching of God. Very inseparable from all true holiness is separation from what is common and unclean. Holy men may be involved in the duties of active life; but only on condition that in

their bosom shall be some inner shrine, whither the din of wordliness never penetrates, and where the lamp of God does not go out.

It is a solemn truth that a kind of inverted holiness is known to Scripture. Men "sanctify themselves" (it is this very word), "and purify themselves to go into the gardens, . . . eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse" (Isa. lxvi. 17). The same word is also used to declare that the whole fruit of a vineyard sown with two kinds of fruit shall be *forfeited* (Deut. xxii. 9), although the notion there is of something unnatural and therefore interdicted, which notion is carried to the utmost extreme in another derivative from the same root, expressing the most depraved of human beings.

Just so, the Greek word "anathema" means both "consecrated" and "marked out for wrath" (Luke xxi. 5; 1 Cor. xvi. 22: the difference in form is insignificant.) And so again our own tongue calls the saints "devoted," and speaks of the "devoted" head of the doomed sinner, being aware that there is a "separation" in sin as really as in purity. The gods of the heathen, like Jehovah, claimed an appropriate "holiness," sometimes unspeakably degraded. They too were separated, and it was through long lines of sphinxes, and many successive chambers, that the Egyptian worshipper attained the shrine of some contemptible or hateful deity. The religion which does not elevate depresses. But the holiness of Jehovah is noble as that of light, incapable of defilement. "Who among the gods is like Thee . . . glorious in holiness?" And Israel soon learned that the worshipper must become assimilated to his ideal: "Ye shall be holy men unto Me" (xxii. 31). It s

so with us. Jesus is separated from sinners. And we are to go forth unto Him out of the camp, bearing His reproach (Heb. vii. 26, xiii. 13).

The remainder of the song is remarkable chiefly for the confidence with which the future is inferred from the past. And the same argument runs through all Scripture. As Moses sang, "Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance," because "Thou stretchedst out Thy right hand, the earth * swallowed" their enemies, so David was sure that goodness and mercy should follow him all the days of his life, because God was already leading him in green pastures and beside still waters. And so St. Paul, knowing in Whom he had believed, was persuaded that He was able to keep his deposit until that day (2 Tim. i. 12).

So should pardon and Scripture and the means of grace reassure every doubting heart; for "if the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have . . . showed us all these things" (Judg. xiii. 23). And in theory, and in good hours, we confess that this is so. But after our song of triumph, if we come upon bitter waters we murmur; and if our bread fail, we expect only to die in the wilderness.

SHUR.

xv. 22-7.

From the Red Sea the Israelites marched into the wilderness of Shur—a general name, of Egyptian origin, for the district between Egypt and Palestine, of which Etham, given as their route in Numbers (xxxiii. 8), is

* This is to be taken literally; it does not mean the waves, but the quicksands in which they "drave heavily," and which, when steeped in the returning waters, engulfed them.

a subdivision. The rugged way led over stone and sand, with little vegetation and no water. And the "three days' journey" to Marah, a distance of thirty-three miles, was their first experience of absolute hardship, for not even the curtain of miraculous cloud could prevent them from suffering keenly by heat and thirst.

It was a period of disillusion. Fond dreams of ease and triumphant progress, with every trouble miraculously smoothed away, had naturally been excited by their late adventure. Their song had exulted in the prospect that their enemies should melt away, and be as still as a stone. But their difficulties did not melt away. The road was weary. They found no water. They were still too much impressed by the miracle at the Red Sea, and by the mysterious Presence overhead, for open complaining to be heard along the route; but we may be sure that reaction had set in, and there was many a sinking heart, as the dreary route stretched on and on, and they realised that, however romantic the main plan of their journey, the details might still be prosaic and exacting. They sang praises unto Him. They soon forgat His works. Aching with such disappointments, at last they reached the waters of Marah, and they could not drink, for they were bitter.

And if Marah be indeed Huwara, as seems to be agreed, the waters are still the worst in all the district. It was when the relief, so confidently expected, failed, and the term of their sufferings appeared to be indefinitely prolonged, that their self-control gave way, and they "murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?" And we may be sure that wherever discontent and unbelief are working secret mischief to the soul, some event, some disappointment or temptation, will find the weak point, and the favourable moment of

attack, just as the seeds of disease find out the morbid constitution, and assail it.

Now, all this is profoundly instructive, because it is true to the universal facts of human nature. When a man is promoted to unexpected rank, or suddenly becomes rich, or reaches any other unlooked-for elevation, he is apt to forget that life cannot, in any position, be a romance throughout, a long thrill, a whole song at the top note of the voice. Affection itself has a dangerous moment, when two united lives begin to realise that even their union cannot banish aches and anxieties, weariness and business cares. Well for them if they are content with the power of love to sweeten what it cannot remove, as loyal soldiers gladly sacrifice all things for the cause, and as Israel should have been proud to endure forced marches under the cloudy banner of its emancipating God.

As neither rank nor affection exempts men from the dust and tedium of life, or from its disappointments, so neither does religion. When one is "made happy" he expects life to be only a triumphal procession towards Paradise, and he is startled when "now for a season, if need be, he is in heaviness through manifold temptations." Yet Christ prayed not that we should be taken out of the world. We are bidden to endure hardness as good soldiers, and to run with patience the race which is set before us; and these phrases indicate our need of the very qualities wherein Israel failed. As yet the people murmured not ostensibly against God, but only against Moses. But the estrangement of their hearts is plain, since they made no appeal to God for relief, but assailed His agent and representative. Yet they had not because they asked not, and relief was found when Moses cried unto the Lord. Their leader was

"faithful in all his house"; and instead of upbraiding his followers with their ingratitude, or bewailing the hard lot of all leaders of the multitude, whose popularity neither merit nor service can long preserve unclouded, he was content to look for sympathy and help where we too may find it.

We read that the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet. In this we discern the same union of Divine grace with human energy and use of means, as in all medicine, and indeed all uses of the divinely enlightened intellect of man. It would have been easy to argue that the waters could only be healed by miracle, and if God wrought a miracle what need was there of human labour? There was need of obedience, and of the co-operation of the human will with the divine. We shall see, in the case of the artificers of the tabernacle, that God inspires even handicraftsmen as well as theologians—being indeed the universal Light, the Giver of all good, not only of Bibles, but of rain and fruitful seasons. But the artisan must labour, and the farmer improve the soil.

Shall we say with the fathers that the tree cast into the waters represents the cross of Christ? At least it is a type of the sweetening and assuaging influences of religion—a new element, entering life, and as well fitted to combine with it as medicinal bark with water, making all wholesome and refreshing to the disappointed wayfarer, who found it so bitter hitherto.

The Lord was not content with removing the grievance of the hour; He drew closer the bonds between His people and Himself, to guard them against another transgression of the kind: "there He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He

proved them." It is pure assumption to pretend that this refers to another account of the giving of the Jewish law, inconsistent with that in the twentieth chapter, and placed at Marah instead of Sinai.* It is a transaction which resembles much rather the promises given (and at various times, although confusion and repetition cannot be inferred) to Abraham and Jacob (Gen. xii. 1-3, xv. 1, 18-21, xvii. 1-14, xxii. 15-18, xxviii. 13-15, xxxv. 10-12). He said, "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His eyes, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and wilt keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon thee which I have put upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord which healeth thee." It is a compact of obedient trust on one side, and protection on the other. If they felt their own sinfulness, it asserted that He who had just healed the waters could also heal their hearts. From the connection between these is perhaps derived the comparison between human hearts and a fountain of sweet water or bitter (Jas. iii. 11).

But certainly the promised protection takes an unexpected shape. What in their circumstances leads to this specific offer of exemption from certain foul diseases—"the boil of Egypt, and the emerods, and the scurvy, and the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed" (Deut. xxviii. 27)? How does this meet the case? Doubtless by reminding them that there are better exemptions than from hardship, and worse evils than privations. If they do not realise this at the spiritual level, at least they can appreciate the threat that "He will bring upon thee again all the diseases of Egypt

* Wellhausen, *Israel*, p. 439.

which thou wast afraid of" (Deut. xxviii. 60). To be even a luxurious and imperial race, but infected by repulsive and hopeless ailments, is not a desirable alternative. Now, such evils, though certainly not in each individual, yet in a race, are the punishments of non-natural conditions of life, such as make the blood run slowly and unhealthily, and charge it with impure deposits. It was God who put them upon the Egyptians.

If Israel would follow His guidance, and accept a somewhat austere destiny, then the desert air and exercise, and even its privations, would become the efficacious means for their exemption from the scourges of indulgence. A time arrived when they looked back with remorse upon crimes which forfeited their immunity, when the Lord said, "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword" (Amos iv. 10).

But it is a significant fact that at this day, after eighteen hundred years of oppression, hardship, and persecution, of the ghetto and the old-clothes trade, the Hebrew race is proverbially exempt from repulsive and contagious disease. They also "certainly do enjoy immunity from the ravages of cholera, fever and small-pox in a remarkable degree. Their blood seems to be in a different condition from that of other people. . . . They seem less receptive of disease caused by blood poisoning than others" (*Journal of Victoria Institute*, xxi. 307). Imperfect as was their obedience, this covenant at least has been literally fulfilled to them.

It is by such means that God is wont to reward His children. Most commonly the seal of blessing from the skies is not rich fare, but bread and fish by the lake side with the blessing of Christ upon them; not

removal from the desert, but a closer sense of the protection and acceptance of Heaven, the nearness of a loving God, and with this, an elevation and purification of the life, and of the body as well as of the soul. Not in vain has St. Paul written "The Lord for the body." Nor was there ever yet a race of men who accepted the covenant of God, and lived in soberness, temperance and chastity, without a signal improvement of the national physique, no longer unduly stimulated by passion, jaded by indulgence, or relaxed by the satiety which resembles but is not repose.

From Marah and its agitations there was a journey of but a few hours to Elim, with its twelve fountains and seventy palm trees—a fair oasis, by which they encamped and rested, while their flocks spread far and wide over a grassy and luxuriant valley.

The picture is still true to the Christian life, with the Palace Beautiful just beyond the lions, and the Delectable Mountains next after Doubting Castle.

CHAPTER XVI.

MURMURING FOR FOOD.

xvi. 1-14.

THE Israelites were now led farther away from all the associations of their accustomed life. From the waters and the palms of Elim they marched deeper into the savage recesses of the desert, haunted by fierce and hostile tribes, such as presently hung upon their rear-guard and cut off their stragglers (Deut. xxv. 18). Nor had they quite emerged from the shadow of their old oppressions, since Egyptian garrisons were scattered, though sparsely, through this district, in which gems and copper were obtained. Here, cut off from all natural modes of sustenance, the hearts of the people failed them. Such is the frequent experience of renewed souls, when privilege and joy are followed by trouble from without or from within, and the peace of God is broken by the strife of tongues, by mental perplexities, by temptations, by physical pain. It is quite as wonderful that paltry disturbances should mar for us the life divine, when once that life has become a realised experience, as that men who moved under the shadow of the marvellous cloud could be agitated by fear for their supplies. And of this our experience, what befel Israel is not a mere type or symbol, it is a case in point, a parallel example. For it also meant the

breaking in of the flesh upon the spirit, the refusal of fallen nature to rise above earthly wants and cravings even in the light of trust and acceptance, the self-assertion of the baser instincts, and the sacrifice to them of the higher life. We recognise the herd of slaves, from whence it must perplex the unbeliever to remember that the seed of immortal heroism and prophetic insight and apostolic service was yet to ripen, in their poor desire, if they must perish, to perish well fed rather than emancipated (ver. 3). Most people, we may fear, would choose to live enslaved rather than to die free men. But there is a special meanness in their regret, since die they must, that they had not died satiated, like the firstborn whom God had slain: "Would that we had died by the hand of Jehovah in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and when we ate bread to the full, for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." And to-day, among those who scorn them, how many are far less ambitious of dying holy and pure than rich, famous or powerful, having glutted their vanity if not their appetite. In the sight of angels this is not a much loftier aim; and the apostle reckoned among the works of the flesh, emulation as well as drunkenness (Gal. v. 19-21).

Tertullian draws a striking contrast between Israel, just now baptized into Moses, but caring more for appetite than for God, and Christ, after His baptism, also in the desert, fasting forty days. "The Lord figuratively retorted upon Israel His reproach" (*Baptism*, xx.)

We are not to suppose that but for their complaining God would have suffered them to hunger, although Moses declared that the reason why flesh should be given to them in the evening, and in the morning bread

to the full, is "for that the Lord heareth your murmurings." But there would have been some difference in the time of the grant, to ripen their faith, some more direct manifestation of His grace, to reward their patience, if unbelief had not precipitated His design. Thus the disciples, when they awakened Jesus in the storm, received the rescue for which they clamoured, but forfeited some higher experience which would have crowned a serener confidence: "Wherefore did ye doubt?" Israel receives what is best in the circumstances, rather than the ideal best, now made unsuitable by their impatience and infidelity. But while the Lord discontinued the test of need and penury, which had proved to be too severe a discipline, He substituted the test of fulness. For we read that the removal of their suspense and anxiety by the gift of manna from heaven was "to prove them whether they will walk in My laws or no" (ver. 4). And in so doing it was seen that worldly and unthankful natures are not to be satisfied; that the disloyal at heart will complain, however favoured. For "the children of Israel wept again and said, Who will give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt for nought, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all: we have nought save this manna to look to" (Num. xi. 4-6). Onions and garlick were more satisfactory to gross appetites than angels' food.

At this point we learn that what is called prosperity may indeed be a result of spiritual failure; that God may sometimes abstain from strong measures with a soul because what ought to mould would only crush; and may grant them their hearts' lust, yet send lean-

ness withal into their souls. Perhaps we are allowed to be comfortable because we are unfit to be heroic.

And we also learn, when prosperous, to remember that plenty, equally with want, has its moral aspect. The Lord tries fortunate men, whether they will be grateful and obedient, trusting in Him and not in uncertain riches, or whether they will forget Him who has done so great things for them, and so perish in calm weather—

> "Like ships that have gone down at sea
> When heaven was all tranquillity."

There is an experiment being tried upon the soul, curious, slow, little-suspected, but incessant, in the giving of daily bread.

In promising relief, God required of them obedience and self-control. They were to respect the Sabbath, and make provision in advance for its requirements. And this direction, given before the Mount of the Lord was reached, has an important bearing upon the question whether the Fourth Commandment was the first institution of a holy day—whether, except as a Church ordinance, the duty of sabbath-keeping has no support beyond the ceremonial law. "For that the Lord hath (already) given you the Sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days" (ver. 29).

While conveying the promise of relief, Moses and Aaron rebuked the people, whose murmurs against them were in reality murmurs against God, since they were but His agents, and He had been visibly their Leader. And the same rebuke applies, for exactly the same reason, to many a modern complaint against the weather, against what people call their "luck," against a thousand provoking things in which the only possible

provocation must come directly from heaven. It is because our religion is so shallow, and our consciousness of God in His world so dim and rudimentary, that we utter such complaints idly, to relieve our feelings, and hear them spoken without a shock.

Such dulness is not to be removed by sounder views of doctrine, but by a more vivid realisation of God. The Israelites knew by what hand they should have fallen if they had died in Egypt; yet in fact they forgot their true Captain, and upbraided their mortal leaders. So do we confess that afflictions arise not out of the ground, yet lose the impress of divinity upon our daily lives, while we ought, like Moses, to "endure as seeing Him who is invisible."

As our Lord was in the habit of asking for some confession, or demanding some small co-operation from those He was about to bless, so the smoking flax of Hebrew faith is tended: it is a promise, and not the actual relief, which calms them. There is a curious difference in the manner of the communications now made to the people. First of all the two brothers unite their energies to hush their outcries: "At evening ye shall know that Jehovah is your leader from Egypt, and in the morning ye shall behold His glory; and what are we, that ye murmur against us?" Then Moses affirms, with all the energy of his chieftainship, that in the evening they shall eat flesh, and in the morning bread to the full. Again he asks them "What are we?" and more sternly and directly charges them with murmuring against Jehovah. And this is a good example of the true meaning of his "meekness." He is fiery enough, but not for his own greatness; rather because he feels his littleness, and that the offence is entirely against God, does he resent their conduct; absence of

self-assertion is his "meekness," and thus we read of it when Miriam and Aaron spake against him, declaring that they were commissioned as well as he (Num. xii. 3). Finally, when order was restored, and some mysterious manifestation was at hand, he resumed the solemn and formal usage of conveying his orders through his brother, and in cold, compact, impressive words, said unto Aaron, "Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the Lord, for He hath heard your murmurings." All this is very dignified and natural. And so is—what after ages could scarcely have invented—the impressive reticence of what follows. "They looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud."

Were they not then intended to "come near"? and was it as they turned their faces to draw nigh that the Vision revealed itself and stopped them? And what was the untold sight which they beheld? The narrative belongs to a primitive age; it is quite unlike the elaborate symbolisms of Ezekiel and Daniel, or even of Isaiah, but yet this undescribed, mystic and solitary glory is not less sublime than the train which covered the Temple-floor, while, hovering above it, reverent seraphim veiled their faces and their feet, or the terrible crystal and the wheels of dreadful height, or the throne of flame whence issued a fiery stream, and before which thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads stood (Isa. vi. 2; Ezek. i. 22, 18; Dan. vii. 9, 10). But the point to observe is that it is different, more primitive, an undefined and lonely vision of awe well fitted for the desert wilds and for the gaze of men whose hearts must not be misled by the likeness of anything in heaven or earth; the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud

(most probably, but not of necessity, the cloud which guided them), and in the direction whence they were so fain to turn away.

No later inventor would have known how to say so little, much less to make that little harmonise so exactly with the lessons meant to be suggested by the wild and solemn solitudes into which they were now plunged.

And now the Lord Himself repeats the promise of relief, but first solemnly announces that He is not heedless of their ill-behaviour while He tolerates it. The question is suggested, although not asked, How long will His forbearance last?

Well for them if they learn the lesson, and "know that I am Jehovah your God," mindful of their needs, entitled to their fealty. In the evening, therefore, came a flight of quails; and in the morning they found a small round thing, small as the hoar-frost, upon the ground.

MANNA.

xvi. 15-36.

The manna which miraculously supplied the wants of Israel was to them an utterly strange food, the use of which they had to learn. Thus it was anothe means of severing their habitual course of life a association of ideas from their degraded past. A while we may not press too far the assertion th it was the "corn of heaven" and "angels' food (*i.e.* "the bread of the mighty"—Psalm lxxviii. 24-R.V.), yet the narrative shows, even without help from later scriptures, that it was calculated to sustain their energies and yet to leave their appetites unstimulated and unpampered. For they were now

called to purer joys than those of the senses—to liberty, a divine vocation, the presence of God, the revelation of His law and the unfolding of His purposes. Failing to rise to these heights, they fell far, murmured again, and perished by the destroyer, not merely to avenge the petulance of an hour, but for all that it betrayed, for treason to their vocation and radical inability to even comprehend its meaning. In the language of modern science, it answered to Nature's rejection of the unfit.

Their calling was thus, though under very different forms, that which the apostles found so hard, yet did not quite refuse: it was to mind the things of God and not the things of men.

It is well known that the manna of the Israelites bore some resemblance to a natural product of the wilderness, still exuded by certain plants during the coolness of the night, and formerly more plentiful than now, when all vegetation has been ruthlessly swept away by the Bedouin. But the differences are much greater than the resemblance. The natural product is a drug, and not a food; it is gathered only during some weeks of summer; it is not liable to speedy corruption, nor could there be any reason for preserving a specimen of this common product in the ark; it could not have sufficed, however aided by their herds and flocks, to feed one in a hundred of the Hebrew multitudes, even during the season of its production; nor could it have ceased on the same day when they ate the first ripe corn of Canaan.

And yet the resemblance is suggestive. Unbelievers find, in the links which connect most of our Scripture miracles with nature, in the undefined and gradual transition from one to the other, as from a temperate

day to night, an excuse for denying that they are miraculous at all. But the instructed believer finds a confirmation of his faith. He reflects that when Fancy begins to toy with the supernatural, she spurns nature from her: the trammels under which she has long chafed are hateful to her, and she flies from them to the utmost extreme.

It could not be thus with Him by whom the system of the world was framed. He will not wantonly interfere with His own plan. He will regard nature as an elastic band to stretch, rather than as a chain to break. If He will multiply food, in the New Testament, that is no reason why His disciples should fare more delicately than Providence intended for them: they shall still eat barley loaves and fish. And so the winds help to overthrow Pharaoh and to bring the quails; and when a new thing has to be created, it approaches in its general idea to one of the few natural products of that inhospitable region.

Now let it be supposed for a moment that the supply of manna had never ceased, so that until this day men could every morning gather a day's ration off the ground. Such continuance of the provision would not make it any the less a gift; but only a more lavish boon. And yet it would clearly cease to be regarded as miraculous, an exception to the course of nature, miscalled her "laws," since men do strive to subvert the miracle by representing that such manna, however scantily, may still be found. And this may expose the folly of a wish, probably sometimes felt by all men, that some miracle had actually been perpetuated, so that we could strengthen our faith at pleasure by looking upon an exhibition of divine power. In truth, no marvel could excel that which annually multiplies the

corn beneath the clod, and by the process of decay in springtime feeds the world in autumn. Only its steady recurrence throws a veil over our eyes; and it is a vain conceit that the same web would not be woven by use between man and the Worker of any other marvel that was perpetuated. Already the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord, for all who have eyes to see.

It is also to be observed that the manna was not given to teach the people sloth. They were obliged to gather it early, before the sun was hot. They had still to endure weary marches, and the care of their flocks and herds.

And, in curious harmony with the manner of all the gifts of nature, the manna sent from heaven had yet to be prepared by man: "bake that which ye will bake, and seethe that which ye will seethe." Thus God, by natural means and by the sweat of our brow, gives us our daily bread; and all knowledge, art and culture are His gifts, although elaborated by the brain and heart of generations whom He taught.

Moreover, there was a protest against the grasping, unbelieving temper which cannot trust God with to-morrow, but longs to have much goods laid up. That is the temper which forfeits the smile of God, and grinds the faces of the poor, to make an ignoble "provision" for the future. How often, since the time of Moses, has the unblessed accumulation become hateful! How often, since the time of St. James, the rust of such possession has eaten the flesh like fire! Men would be far more generous, the difference between wealth and poverty would be less portentous, and the resources of religion and charity less crippled, if we lived in the spirit of the Lord's prayer, desirous of the advance of the kingdom, but not asking to be given

to-morrow's bread until to-morrow. That lesson was taught by the manner of the dispensation of the manna, but the covetousness of Israel would not learn it. The people actually strove to be dishonest in their enjoyment of a miracle. It is no wonder that Moses was wroth with them.

Among the strange properties of their supernatural food not the least curious was this: that when they came to measure what they had collected, and compare it with what Moses had bidden,* the most eager and able-bodied had nothing over, and the feeblest had no lack. Every real worker was supplied, and none was glutted. This result is apparently miraculous. St. Paul's use of it does not, as some have supposed, represent it as a result of Hebrew benevolence, sharing with the weak the more abundant supplies of the strong: the miracle is not cited as an example of charity, but of that practical equality, divinely approved, which Christian charity should reproduce; the Christian Church is bidden to do voluntarily what was done by miracle in the wilderness: "your abundance being a supply at this present time for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack" (2 Cor. viii. 15).

It is quite in vain to appeal to this passage in favour of socialistic theories. In the first place it applies only to the necessities of existence; and even granting that

* The "omer" of this passage is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture: it is known to have been the one-hundredth part of the homer with which careless readers sometimes confuse it, and its capacity is variously estimated, from somewhat under half a gallon to somewhat above three-quarters.

the state should enforce the principle to which it points, the duty would not extend beyond a liberal poor rate. When contributions were afterwards demanded for the sanctuary, there is no trace of a dead level in their resources: the rulers gave the gems and spices and oil, some brought gold, with some were found blue and linen and skins, and others had acacia-wood to offer (xxxv. 22-4).

In the second place, this arrangement was only temporary; and while the soil of Canaan was distinctly claimed for the Lord, the enjoyment of it by individuals was secured, and perpetuated in their families, by stringent legislation. Now, land is the kind of property which socialists most vehemently assail; but persons who appeal to Exodus must submit to the authority of Judges.

Socialism, therefore, and its coercive measures, find no more real sanction here than in the Church of Jerusalem, where the property of Ananias was his own, and the price of it in his own power. But yet it is highly significant that in both Testaments, as the Church of God starts upon its career, an example should be given of the effacing of inequalities, in the one case by miracle, in the other by such a voluntary movement as best becomes the gospel. Is not such a movement, large and free, the true remedy for our modern social distractions and calamities? Would it not be wise and Christ-like for the rich to give, as St. Paul taught the Corinthians to give, what the law could never wisely exact from them? Would not self-denial, on a scale to imply real sacrifice, and fulfilling in spirit rather than letter the apostle's aspiration for "equality," secure in return the enthusiastic adhesion to the rights of property of all that is best and noblest among the poor?

When will the world, or even the Church, awaken to the great truth that our politics also need to be steeped in Christian feeling—that humanity requires not a revolution but a pentecost—that a millennium cannot be enacted, but will dawn whenever human bosoms are emptied of selfishness and lust, and filled with brotherly kindness and compassion? Such, and no more, was the socialism which St. Paul deduced from the equality in the supply of manna.

SPIRITUAL MEAT.

xvi. 15-36.

Since the journey of Israel is throughout full of sacred meaning, no one can fail to discern a mystery in the silent ceaseless daily miracle of bread-giving. But we are not left to our conjectures. St. Paul calls manna "spiritual meat," not because it nourished the higher life (for the eaters of it murmured for flesh, and were not estranged from their lust), but because it answered to realities of the spiritual world (1 Cor. x. 3). And Christ Himself said, "It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven, but My Father giveth you the true Bread from heaven," making manna the type of sustenance which the soul needs in the wilderness, and which only God can give (John vi. 32).

We note the time of its bestowal. The soul has come forth out of its bondage. Perhaps it imagines that emancipation is enough: all is won when its chains are broken: there is to be no interval between the Egypt of sin and the Promised Land of milk and honey and repose. Instead of this serene attainment, it finds that the soul requires to be fed, and no food is to be seen, but only a wilderness of scorching

heat, dry sand, vacancy, and hunger. Old things have passed away, but it is not yet realised that all things have become new. Religion threatens to become a vast system for the removal of accustomed indulgences and enjoyments, but where is the recompense for all that it forbids? The soul cries out for food: well for it if the cry be not faithless, nor spoken to earthly chiefs alone!

There is a noteworthy distinction between the gift of manna and every other recorded miracle of sustenance. In Eden the fruit of immortality was ripening upon an earthly tree. The widow of Zarephath was fed from her own stores. The ravens bore to Elijah ordinary bread and flesh; and if an angel fed him, it was with a cake baken upon coals. Christ Himself was content to multiply common bread and fish, and even after His resurrection gave His apostles the fare to which they were accustomed. Thus they learned that the divine life must be led amid the ordinary conditions of mortality. Even the incarnation of Deity was wrought in the likeness of sinful flesh. But yet the incarnation was the bringing of a new life, a strange and unknown energy, to man.

And here, almost at the beginning of revelation, is typified, not the homely conditions of the inner life, but its unearthly nature and essence. Here is no multiplication of their own stores, no gift, like the quails, of such meat as they were wont to gather. They asked "What is it?" And this teaches the Christian that his sustenance is not of this world. They were fed "with manna which they knew not . . . to make them know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God doth man live" (Deut. viii. 3). The root of worldliness

is not in this indulgence or that, in gay clothing or an active career; but in the soul's endeavour to draw its nourishment from things below. And spirituality belongs not to an uncouth vocabulary, nor to the robes of any confraternity, to rigid rules or austere deportment; it is the blessedness of a life nourished upon the bread of heaven, and doomed to starve if that bread be not bestowed. Let not the wealthy find an insuperable bar to spirituality in his condition, nor the poor suppose that indigence cannot have its treasure upon earth; but let each man ask whence come his most real and practical impulses and energies upon life's journey. If these flow from even the purest earthly source—love of wife or child, anything else than communion with the Father of spirits, this is not the bread of life, and can no more nourish a pilgrim towards eternity than the husks which swine eat.

There is no mistaking the doctrine of the New Testament as to what this bread may be. By prayer and faith, by ordinances and sacraments rightly used, the manna may be gathered; but Jesus Himself is the Bread of life, His Flesh is meat indeed and His Blood is drink indeed, and He gives His Flesh for the life of the world. Christ is the Vine, and we are the branches, fruitful only by the sap which flows from Him. As there are diseases which cannot be overcome by powerful drugs, but by a generous and wholesome dietary, so is it with the diseases of the soul—pride, anger, selfishness, falsehood, lust. As the curse of sin is removed by the faith which appropriates pardon, so its power is broken by the steady personal acceptance of Christ; and our Bread and Wine are His new humanity, given to us, until He becomes the second Father of the race, which is begotten again in Him. An easy temper is

not Christian meekness; dislike to witness pain is not Christian love. All our goodness must strike root deeper than in the sensibilities, must be nourished by the communication to us of the mind which was in Christ Jesus.

And this food is universally given, and universally suitable. The strong and the weak, the aged chieftain and little children, ate and were nourished. No stern decree excluded any member of the visible Church in the wilderness from sharing the bread from heaven: they did eat the same spiritual meat, provided only that they gathered it. Their part was to be in earnest in accepting, and so is ours; but if we fail, whom shall we blame except ourselves? In the mystery of its origin, in the silent and secret mode of its descent from above, in the constancy of its bestowal, and in its suitability for all the camp, for Moses and the youngest child, the manna prefigured Christ.

Every day a fresh supply had to be laid up, and nothing could be held over from the largest hoard. So it is with us: we must give ourselves to Christ for ever, but we must ask Him daily to give Himself to us. The richest experience, the purest aspiration, the humblest self-abandonment that was ever felt, could not reach forward to supply the morrow. Past graces will become loathsome if used instead of present supplies from heaven. And the secret of many a scandalous fall is that the unhappy soul grew self-confident: unlike St. Paul, he reckoned that he had already attained; and thereupon the graces in which he trusted became corrupt and vile.

The constant supply was not more needful than it was abundant. The manna lay all around the camp: the Bread of Life is He who stands at our door and

knocks. Alas for those who murmur for grosser indulgences! Israel demanded and obtained them; but while the flesh was in their nostrils the angel of the Lord went forth and smote them. Is there no plague any longer for the perverse? What are the discords that convulse families, the uncurbed passions to which nothing is sacred, the jaded appetite and weary discontent which hates the world even as it hates itself? what but the judgment of God upon those who despise His provision, and must needs gratify themselves? Be it our happiness, as it is our duty, to trust Him to prepare our table before us, while He leads us to His Holy Land.

The Lord of the Sabbath already taught His people to respect His day. Upon it no manna fell; and we shall hereafter see the bearing of this incident upon the question whether the Sabbath is only an ordinance of Judaism. Meanwhile they who went out to gather had a sharp lesson in the difference between faith, which expects what God has promised, and presumption, which hopes not to lose much by disobeying Him.

Lastly, an omer of manna was to be kept throughout all generations, before the Testimony. Grateful remembrance of past mercies, temporal as well as spiritual, was to connect itself with the deepest and most awful mysteries of religion. So let it be with us. The bitter proverb that eaten bread is soon forgotten must never be true of the Christian. He is to remember all the way that the Lord his God hath led him. He is bidden to "forget not all His benefits, Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases . . . Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things." So foolish is the slander that religion is too transcendental for the common life of man.

CHAPTER XVII.

MERIBAH.

xvii. 1-7.

THE people, miraculously fed, are therefore called to exhibit more confidence in God than hitherto, because much is required of him to whom much is given. They have now to plunge deeper into the wilderness; and after two stages which Exodus omits (Num. xxxiii. 12, 13), and just as they approach the mount of God, they find themselves without water. Even the Son of Man Himself was led into the wilderness next after the descent of the Spirit, and the avowal by the voice of God; nor is any true Christian to marvel if his seasons of special privilege are succeeded by special demands upon his firmness.

One finds himself conjecturing, very often, what nobler history, what grander analogies between type and antitype, what more gracious and lavish interpositions might have instructed us, if only the type had been less woefully imperfect—if Israel had been trustful as Moses was, and the crude material had not marred the design.

It would be more practical and edifying to reflect how often we ourselves, like Israel, might have learned and exemplified deep things of the grace of God, when all we really exhibited was the well-worn lesson of human frailty and divine forbearance.

In the story of our Lord it has been observed that before the Pharisees directly assailed Himself, they found fault with His disciples who fasted not, or accosted them concerning Him Who ate with sinners. And so here the people really tempted God, but openly "strove with Moses," and with Aaron too, for the verb is a plural one: "Give *ye* water" (ver. 2).

But as Aaron is merely an agent and spokesman, the chief value of this tacit allusion to him, besides proving his fidelity, is to refute the notion that he sinks into comparative obscurity only after the sin of the golden calf. Already his position is one to be indicated rather than expressed; and Moses said, "Why do ye quarrel with me? wherefore do ye try the Lord?"

But the frenzy rose higher: it was he, and not a higher One, who had brought them out of Egypt; the upshot of it would only be "to kill us, and our children, and our cattle, with thirst."

Look closely at this expression, and a curious significance discloses itself. Was it mere covetousness, the spirit of the Jew Shylock lamenting in one breath his daughter and his ducats, which introduced the cattle along with the children into this complaint of dying men? Shylock himself, when death actually looked him in the face, readily sacrificed his fortune. Nor is it credible that a large number of people, really believing that a horrible death was imminent, would have spent any complaints upon their property. The language is exactly that of angry exaggeration. They have come through straits quite as desperate, and they know it well. It is not the fear of death, but the painful delay of rescue, the discomfort and misery of their condition in the meanwhile, the contrast between their sufferings and their own conception of the rights of the

favourites of heaven, which is audible in this complaint. And thus their "Trial" and "Quarrel" are admirably epitomised in the phrase "Is Jehovah among us or not?" a phrase which has often since been in the heart, if not upon the lips, of men who had supposed the life divine to be one long holiday, the pilgrimage an excursion, when without are fightings and within fears, when they have great sorrow and heaviness in their hearts.

Because God is not a Judge, but a Father, the murmurs of Israel do not prevent Him from showing mercy. Accordingly, when Moses prays, he is bidden to go on before the people, bringing certain of their elders along with him for witnesses of the marvel that was to follow. Such is the Divine method. As soon as unbelief and discontent estranged the Jews of the New Testament from Christ, He would not vulgarise His miracles, nor do many mighty works among the unbelieving. After His resurrection He appeared not unto all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before. And as the Jews were chosen to bear witness to Him among the nations, so were these elders now to bear witness among the Jews, who might without their testimony have fallen into some such rationalising theory as that of Tacitus, who says that Moses discovered a fountain by examining a spot where wild asses lay.

With these witnesses, he is bidden to go to a rock in Horeb (so nearly had these murmurers approached the scene of the most awful of all manifestations of Him whose presence they debated), and there God was to stand before them upon the rock, making His universal presence a localised consciousness in their experience.

A true religion is progressive: every stage of it leans

on the past and sustains the future; and so Moses must bring with him "the rod, wherewith thou smotest the river." The dullest can see the fitness of this allusion. Among all the wonders which the shepherd's wand had wrought, the mastery over the Nile, the plague which inflicted an unwonted thirst upon the inhabitants of that well-watered field of Zoan, was most to the purpose now. To kill and to make alive are the functions of the same Being, and He Who spoiled the Egyptian river will now refresh His heritage that is weary. At the touch of the prophetic wand the waters poured forth which thenceforth supplied them through all their desert wanderings.

Reserving the symbolic meaning of this event for a future study, we have to remember meanwhile the warning which the apostle here discovered. All the people drank of the rock, yet with many of them God was not pleased. Privilege is one thing—acceptance is quite another; and it shall be more tolerable at last for Sodom and Gomorrah than for nations, churches and men, who were content to resemble soil that drinketh in the rain that cometh upon it oft, and yet to remain unfruitful. Already the conduct of Israel was such that the place was named from human worthlessness rather than Divine beneficence. Too often, it is the more conspicuous part of the story of the relations of God and man.

AMALEK.

xvii. 8-16.

Nothing can be more natural, to those who remember the value of a fountain in the East, than that Amalek should swoop down from his own territories upon

Israel, as soon as this abundant river tempted his cupidity. This unprovoked attack of a kindred nation leads to another advance in the education of the people.

They had hitherto been the sheep of God: now they must become His warriors. At the Red Sea it was said to them, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord . . . the Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (xiv. 13). But it is not so now. Just as the function of every true miracle is to lead to a state of faith in which miracles are not required; just as a mother reaches her hand to a tottering infant, that presently the boy may go alone, so the Lord fought for Israel, that Israel might learn to fight for the Lord. The herd of slaves who came out of Egypt could not be trusted to stand fast in battle; and what a defeat would have done with them we may judge by their outcries at the very sight of Pharaoh. But now they had experience of Divine succour, and had drawn the inspiring breath of freedom. And so it was reasonable to expect that some chosen men of them at least will be able to endure the shock of battle. And if so, it was a matter of the last importance to develop and render conscious the national spirit, a spirit so noble in its unselfish readiness to die, and in its scorn of such material ills as anguish and mutilation compared with baseness and dishonour, that the re-kindling of it in seasons of peril and conflict is more than half a compensation for the horrors of a battle-field.

We do not now inquire what causes avail to justify the infliction and endurance of those horrors. Probably they will vary from age to age; and as the ties grow strong which bind mankind together, the rupture of them will be regarded with an ever-deepening shudder,

—just as England to-day would certainly refuse to make war upon our American kinsmen for a provocation which (rightly or wrongly) she would not endure from Russians. But the point to be observed is that war cannot be inherently immoral, since God instructed in war the first nation that He ever trained, not using its experience of His immediate interpositions to supersede all need of human strife, but to make valiant soldiers, and adding some of the most precious lessons of all their later experience on the battle-field and by the sword. Now, it assuredly cannot be shown that anything in itself immoral is fostered and encouraged by the Old Testament. Slavery and divorce, which it was not yet possible to extirpate, were hampered, restricted, and reduced to a minimum, being "suffered" "because of the hardness of 'their' hearts" (Matt. xix. 8). The wildest assailant of the Pentateuch will scarcely pretend that it fosters and incites either divorce or slavery, as, beyond all question, it encourages the martial ardour of the Jews.

And yet war, though permissible, and in certain circumstances necessary, is only necessary as the lesser of two evils; it is not in itself good. Solomon, not David, could build the temple of the Lord; and Isaiah sharply contrasts the Messiah with even that providentially appointed conqueror, the only pagan who is called by God "My anointed," in that the one comes upon rulers as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay, but the Other breaks not a bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax (Isa. xli. 25, xlii. 3, xlv. 1). The ideal of humanity is peace, and also it is happiness, but war may not yet have ceased to be a necessity of life, sometimes as ruinous to evade as any other form of suffering.

Another necessity of national development is the advancement of capable men. The empire of Napoleon would assuredly have withered, if only because its chief was as jealous of commanding genius as he was ready to advance and patronise capacity of the second order. It is a maxim that true greatness finds worthy colleagues and successors, and rejoices in them. And while the guidance of Jehovah is to be assumed throughout, it is significant that the first mention of the splendid commander and godly judge, during all whose days and the days of his contemporaries Israel served Jehovah, comes not in any express revelation or commandment of God; but the narrative relates that Moses said unto Joshua, "Choose out men for us and go out, fight with Amalek: to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." They are the words of one who had noted him already as "a man in whom is the Spirit" (Num. xxvii. 18), of one also who had unlearned, in the experience now of eighty years, the desire of glittering achievement and martial fame, who knew that the deepest fountains of real power are hidden, and was content that another should lead the headlong and victorious charge, if only it were his to hold, upon the top of the hill, the rod of God.

Once it was his own rod: with it the exiled shepherd controlled the sheep of his master; that it should be the medium of the miraculous had appeared to be an additional miracle, but now it was the very rod of God, nor was any cry to heaven more eloquent and better grounded than simply the reaching toward the skies, in long, steady, mute appeal, of that symbol of all His dealings with them—the plaguing of Egypt, the recession of the tide and its wild return, the bringing of

water from the rock. Was all to be in vain? Should the wild boar waste the vine just brought out of Egypt before ever it reached the appointed vineyard? And we also should be able to plead with God the noble works that He hath done in our time. For us also there ought to be such experience as worketh hope. As long as the exertion was possible even to the heroic force which age had not abated, Moses thus prayed for his people; for the gesture was a prayer, and a grand one, and must not be criticised otherwise than as the act of a poetic and primitive genius, whose institutions throughout are full of spiritual import. While he did this, Israel prevailed; but the slow progress of the victory reminds us of these dreary centuries during which we are just able to discern some gradual advance of the kingdom of Christ on earth, but no rout, no collapse of evil. And why was this? Because the sustaining and permanent energy was not to flow from the prayers of one, however holy and however eminent; three men were together in the mountain, and the co-operation of them all was demanded; so that only when Aaron and Hur supported the sinking hand of their chief was the decisive victory given.

Now, the lesson from all this does not concern the High-priestly intercession of our Lord, for the office of Moses is consistently distinguished from the priesthood. Nor can the notion be tolerated that if our Lord requires mortal co-operation before asking and being given the heathen for His heritage, which is obviously the case, the reason can be at all expressed by that weakness which needed support.

No, the Lord our Priest is also Himself the dispenser of victory. To Him all power is given on earth, and to Him it is our duty to appeal for the

triumph of His own cause. And here and there, doubtless, a Christian heart is fervent and faithful in its intercessions. To these, unknown, unsuspected by the combatants in the heat of battle,—to humble saints, some of them bed-ridden, ignorant, poverty-stricken, despised, holy souls who have no controversial skill, no missionary calling, but who possess the grace habitually to convert their wishes into prayers,—to such, perhaps, it is due that the idols of India and China are now bowing down. And when they cease to be a minority in so doing, when those who now criticise learn to sustain their flagging energies, we shall see a day of the Lord.

Observe, however, that as the active exertion of the host does not displace the silence of intercession, neither is it displaced itself: Joshua really bore his part in the discomfiture of Amalek and his host. And so it is always. The development of human energy to the uttermost is a part of the design of Him Who gave a task even to unfallen man. Let none suppose that to labour is (sufficiently and by itself) to pray; but also let none idly persuade himself that while energies and responsibilities are his, to pray is sufficiently to labour.

Thus it came to pass that Israel won its first victory in battle. Another step was taken toward the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation; and also toward the gradual transference of the national faith from a passive reliance in Divine interposition to an abiding confidence in Divine help. Let it be clearly understood that this latter is the nobler and the more mature faith.

With martial ardour, God took care to inculcate the sense of national responsibility, without which warriors become no more than brigands. So it was with

Amalek: he had not been attacked or even menaced, he had marched out from his own territories to assail an innocent and kindred race ("then *came* Amalek" ver. 8), and his attack had been cruel and cowardly, he smote the hindmost, all that were feeble and in the rear, when they were faint and weary, and he feared not God (Deut. xxv. 18). Against all such tactics the wrath of God was denounced when, because of them, Amalek was doomed to total extirpation.

Moses now built an altar, to imprint on the mind of the people this new lesson. And he called it, "The Lord is my Banner," a title which called the nation at once to valour and to obedience, which asserted that they were an army, but a consecrated one.

Now let us ask whether this simple story is at all the kind of thing which legend or myth would have created, for the first martial exploit of Israel. The obscure part played by Moses is not what we would expect; nor, even as a mediator, is the position of one whose arms must be held up a very romantic conception. If the object is to inspire the Jews for later struggles with more formidable foes, the story is ill-contrived, for we read of no surprising force of Amalek, and no inspiriting exploit of Joshua. Everything is as prosaic as the real course of events in this poor world is wont to be. And on that account it is all the more useful to us who live prosaic lives, and need the help of God among prosaic circumstances.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JETHRO.

xviii. 1-27.

THE defeat of Amalek is followed by the visit of Jethro; the opposite pole of the relation between Israel and the nations, the coming of the Gentiles to his brightness. And already that is true which repeats itself all through the history of the Church, that much secular wisdom, the art of organisation, the structure and discipline of societies, may be drawn from the experience and wisdom of the world.

Moses was under the special guidance of God, as really as any modern enthusiast can claim to be. When he turned for aid or direction to heaven, he was always answered. And yet he did not think scorn of the counsel of his kinsman. And although eighty years had not dimmed the fire of his eyes, nor wasted his strength, he neglected not the warning which taught him to economise his force; not to waste on every paltry dispute the attention and wisdom which could govern the new-born state.

Jethro is the kinsman, and probably the brother-in-law of Moses; for if he were the father-in-law, and the same as Reuel in the second chapter, why should a new name be introduced without any mark of identification? When he hears of the emancipation of Israel

from Egypt, he brings back to Moses his two sons and Zipporah, who had been sent away, after the angry scene at the circumcision of the younger, and before he entered Egypt with his life in his hand. Now he was a great personage, the leader of a new nation, and the conqueror of the proudest monarch in the world. With what feelings would the wife and husband meet? We are told nothing of their interview, nor have we any reason to qualify the unfavourable impression produced by the circumstances of their parting, by the schismatic worship founded by their grandchildren, and by the loneliness implied in the very names of Gershom and Eliezer—"A-stranger-there," and "God-a-Help."

But the relations between Moses and Jethro are charming, whether we look at the obeisance rendered to the official minister of God by him whom God had honoured so specially, by the prosperous man to the friend of his adversity, or at the interest felt by the priest of Midian in all the details of the great deliverance of which he had heard already, or his joy in a Divine manifestation, probably not in all respects according to the prejudices of his race, or his praise of Jehovah as "greater than all gods, yea, in the thing wherein they dealt proudly against them" (ver. 11, R.V.). The meaning of this phrase is either that the gods were plagued in their own domains, or that Jehovah had finally vanquished the Egyptians by the very element in which they were most oppressive, as when Moses himself had been exposed to drown.

There is another expression, in the first verse, which deserves to be remarked. How do the friends of a successful man think of the scenes in which he has borne a memorable part? They chiefly think of them

in connection with their own hero. And amid all the story of the Exodus, in which so little honour is given to the human actor, the one trace of personal exultation is where it is most natural and becoming; it is in the heart of his relative: "When Jethro . . . heard of all that the Lord had done *for Moses* and for Israel."

We are told, with marked emphasis, that this Midianite, a priest, and accustomed to act as such with Moses in his family, "took a burnt-offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God." Nor can we doubt that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who laid such stress upon the subordination of Abraham to Melchizedek, would have discerned in the relative position of Jethro and Aaron another evidence that the ascendency of the Aaronic priesthood was only temporary. We shall hereafter see that priesthood is a function of redeemed humanity, and that all limitations upon it were for a season, and due to human shortcoming. But for this very reason (if there were no other) the chief priest could only be He Who represents and embodies all humanity, in Whom is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, because He is all and in all.

In the meantime, here is recognised, in the history of Israel, a Gentile priesthood.

And, as at the passover, so now, the sacrifice to God is partaken of by His people, who are conscious of acceptance by Him. Happy was the union of innocent festivity with a sacramental recognition of God. It is the same sentiment which was aimed at by the primitive Christian Church in her feasts of love, genuine meals in the house of God, until licence and appetite spoiled them, and the apostle asked "Have ye not houses to

eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. xi. 22). Shall there never come a time when the victorious and pure Church of the latter days shall regain what we have forfeited, when the doctrine of the consecration of what is called "secular life" shall be embodied again in forms like these? It speaks to us meanwhile in a form which is easily ridiculed (as in Lamb's well-known essay), and yet singularly touching and edifying if rightly considered, in the asking for a blessing upon our meals.

On the morrow, Jethro saw Moses, all day long, deciding the small matters and great which needed already to be adjudicated for the nation. He who had striven, without a commission, himself to smite the Egyptian and lead out Israel, is the same self-reliant, heroic, not too discreet person still.

But the true statesman and administrator is he who employs to the utmost all the capabilities and energies of his subordinates. And Jethro made a deep mark in history when he taught Moses the distinction between the lawgiver and the judge, between him who sought from God and proclaimed to the people the principles of justice and their form, and him who applied the law to each problem as it arose.

"It is supposed, and with probability," writes Kalisch (*in loco*), "that Alfred the Great, who was well versed in the Bible, based his own Saxon constitution of sheriffs in counties, etc., on the example of the Mosaic division (comp. *Bacon on English Government*, i. 70)." And thus it may be that our own nation owes its free institutions almost directly to the generous interest in the well-being of his relative, felt by an Arabian priest, who cherished, amid the growth of idolatries all around him, the primitive belief in God, and who rightly held that the first qualifications of a capable judge were

ability, and the fear of God, truthfulness and hatred of unjust gain.

We learn from Deuteronomy (i. 9-15), that Moses allowed the people themselves to elect these officials, who became not only their judges but their captains.

From the whole of this narrative we see clearly that the intervention of God for Israel is no more to be regarded as superseding the exercise of human prudence and common-sense, than as dispensing with valour in the repulse of Amalek, and with patience in journeying through the wilderness.

THE TYPICAL BEARINGS OF THE HISTORY.

WE are now about to pass from history to legislation. And this is a convenient stage at which to pause, and ask how it comes to pass that all this narrative is also, in some sense, an allegory. It is a discussion full of pitfalls. Countless volumes of arbitrary and fanciful interpretation have done their worst to discredit every attempt, however cautious and sober, at finding more than the primary signification in any narrative.* And whoever considers the reckless, violent and inconsistent methods of the mystical commentators may be forgiven if he recoils from occupying the ground which they have wasted, and contents himself with simply drawing the lessons which the story directly suggests.

But the New Testament does not warrant such a surrender. It tells us that leaven answers to malice, and unleavened bread to sincerity; that at the Red Sea the people were baptized; that the tabernacle and the altar, the sacrifice and the priest, the mercy-seat and the manna, were all types and shadows of abiding Christian realities.

It is more surprising to find the return of the infant Jesus connected with the words "When Israel was a

* Take as an example the assertion of Bunyan that the sea in the Revelation is a sea of glass, because the laver in the tabernacle was made of the brazen looking-glasses of the women. (*Solomon's Temple*, xxxvi. 1.)

child then I loved him, and I called My son out of Egypt,"—for it is impossible to doubt that the prophet was here speaking of the Exodus, and had in mind the phrase "Israel is My son, My first-born: let My son go, that he may serve Me" (Matt. i. 15; Hos. xi. 1; Exod. iv. 22).

How are such passages to be explained? Surely not by finding a superficial resemblance between two things, and thereupon transferring to one of them whatever is true of the other. No thought can attain accuracy except by taking care not to confuse in this way things which superficially resemble each other.

But no thought can be fertilising and suggestive which neglects real and deep resemblances, resemblances of principle as well as incident, resemblances which are due to the mind of God or the character of man.

In the structure and furniture of the tabernacle, and the order of its services, there are analogies deliberately planned, and such as every one would expect, between religious truth shadowed forth in Judaism, and the same truth spoken in these latter days unto us in the Son.

But in the emancipation, the progress, and alas! the sins and chastisements of Israel, there are analogies of another kind, since here it is history which resembles theology, and chiefly secular things which are compared with spiritual. But the analogies are not capricious; they are based upon the obvious fact that the same God Who pitied Israel in bondage sees, with the same tender heart, a worse tyranny. For it is not a figure of speech to say that sin is slavery. Sin does outrage the will, and degrade and spoil the life. The sinner does obey a hard and merciless master. If his true

home is in the kingdom of God, he is, like Israel, not only a slave but an exile. Is God the God of the Jew only? for otherwise He must, being immutable, deal with us and our tyrant as He dealt with Israel and Pharaoh. If He did not, by an exertion of omnipotence, transplant them from Egypt to their inheritance at one stroke, but required of them obedience, co-operation, patient discipline, and a gradual advance, why should we expect the whole work and process of grace to be summed up in the one experience which we call conversion? Yet if He did, promptly and completely, break their chains and consummate their emancipation, then the fact that grace is a progressive and gradual experience does not forbid us to reckon ourselves dead unto sin. If the region through which they were led, during their time of discipline, was very unlike the land of milk and honey which awaited the close of their pilgrimage, it is not unlikely that the same God will educate his later Church by the same means, leading us also by a way that we know not, to humble and prove us, that He may do us good at the latter end.

And if He marks, by a solemn institution, the period when we enter into covenant relations with Himself, and renounce the kingdom and tyranny of His foe, is it marvellous that the apostle found an analogy for this in the great event by which God punctuated the emancipation of Israel, leading them out of Egypt through the sea depths and beneath the protecting cloud?

If privilege, and adoption, and the Divine good-will, did not shelter them from the consequences of ingratitude and rebellion, if He spared not the natural branches, we should take heed lest He spare not us.

Such analogies are really arguments, as solid as those of Bishop Butler.

But the same cannot be maintained so easily of some others. When that is quoted of our Lord upon the cross which was written of the paschal lamb, "a bone shall not be broken" (Exod. xii. 46, John xix. 36), we feel that the citation needs to be justified upon different grounds. But such grounds are available. He was the true Lamb of God. For His sake the avenger passes over all His followers. His flesh is meat indeed. And therefore, although no analogy can be absolutely perfect, and the type has nothing to declare that His blood is drink indeed, yet there is an admirable fitness, worthy of inspired record, in the consummating and fulfilment in Him, and in Him alone of three sufferers, of the precept "A bone of Him shall not be broken." It may not be an express prophecy which is brought to pass, but it is a beautiful and appropriate correspondence, wrought out by Providence, not available for the coercion of sceptics, but good for the edifying of believers.

And so it is with the calling of the Son out of Egypt. Unquestionably Hosea spoke of Israel. But unquestionably too the phrase "My Son, My Firstborn" is a startling one. Here is already a suggestive difference between the monotheism of the Old Testament and the austere jealous logical orthodoxy of the Koran, which protests "It is not meet for God to have any Son, God forbid" (Sura xix. 36). Jesus argued that such a rigid and lifeless orthodoxy as that of later Judaism, ought to have been scandalised, long before it came to consider His claims, by the ancient and recognised inspiration which gave the name of gods to men who sat in judgment as the representatives of Heaven. He claimed the right to carry still further the same principle—namely, that deity is not selfish and

incommunicable, but practically gives itself away, in transferring the exercise of its functions. From such condescension everything may be expected, for God does not halt in the middle of a path He has begun to tread.

But if this argument of Jesus were a valid one (and the more it is examined the more profound it will be seen to be), how significant will then appear the term "My Son," as applied to Israel!

In condescending so far, God almost pledged Himself to the Incarnation, being no dealer in half measures, nor likely to assume rhetorically a relation to mankind to which in fact He would not stoop.

Every Christian feels, moreover, that it is by virtue of the grand and final condescension that all the preliminary steps are possible. Because Abraham's seed was one, that is Christ, therefore ye (all) if ye are Christ's, are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise (Gal. iii. 16, 29).

But when this great harmony comes to be devoutly recognised, a hundred minor and incidental points of contact are invested with a sacred interest.

No doctrinal injury would have resulted, if the Child Jesus had never left the Holy Land. No infidel could have served his cause by quoting the words of Hosea. Nor can we now cite them against infidels as a prophecy fulfilled. But when He does return from Egypt our devotions, not our polemics, hail and rejoice in the coincidence. It reminds us, although it does not demonstrate, that He who is thus called out of Egypt is indeed the Son.

The sober historian cannot prove anything, logically and to demonstration, by the reiterated interventions in history of atmospheric phenomena. And yet no

devout thinker can fail to recognise that God has reserved the hail against the time of trouble and war.

In short, it is absurd and hopeless to bid us limit our contemplation, in a divine narrative, to what can be demonstrated like the propositions of Euclid. We laugh at the French for trying to make colonies and constitutions according to abstract principles, and proposing, as they once did, to reform Europe "after the Chinese manner." Well, religion also is not a theory: it is the true history of the past of humanity, and it is the formative principle in the history of the present and the future.

And hence it follows that we may dwell with interest and edification upon analogies, as every great thinker confesses the existence of truths, "which never can be proved."

In the meantime it is easy to recognise the much simpler fact, that these things happened unto them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT SINAI.

xix. 1-25.

IN the third month from the Exodus, and on the self-same day (which addition fixes the date precisely), the people reached the wilderness of Sinai. This answers fairly to the date of Pentecost, which was afterwards connected by tradition with the giving of the law. And therefore Pentecost was the right time for the gift of the Holy Ghost, bringing with Him the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and that freedom from servile Jewish obedience which is not attained by violating law, but by being imbued in its spirit, by the love which is the fulfilling of the law.

There is among the solemn solitudes of Sinai a wide amphitheatre, reached by two converging valleys, and confronted by an enormous perpendicular cliff, the Ras Sufsâfeh—a "natural altar," before which the nation had room to congregate, awed by the stern magnificence of the approach, and by the intense loneliness and desolation of the surrounding scene, and thus prepared for the unparalleled revelation which awaited them.

It is the manner of God to speak through nature and the senses to the soul. We cannot imagine the youth of the Baptist spent in Nazareth, nor of Jesus in the desert. Elijah, too, was led into the wilderness to

receive the vision of God, and the agony of Jesus was endured at night, and secluded by the olives from the paschal moon. It is by another application of the same principle that the settled Jewish worship was bright with music and splendid with gold and purple; and the notion that the sublime and beautiful in nature and art cannot awaken the feelings to which religion appeals, is as shallow as the notion that when these feelings are awakened all is won.

What happens next is a protest against this latter extreme. Awe is one thing: the submission of the will is another. And therefore Moses was stopped when about to ascend the mountain, there to keep the solemn appointment that was made when God said, "This shall be the token unto thee that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (iii. 12). His own sense of the greatness of the crisis perhaps needed to be deepened. Certainly the nation had to be pledged, induced to make a deliberate choice, now first, as often again, under Joshua and Samuel, and when Elijah invoked Jehovah upon Carmel. (Josh. xxiv. 24; 1 Sam. xii. 14; 1 Kings xviii. 21, 39.)

It is easy to speak of pledges and formal declarations lightly, but they have their warrant in many such Scriptural analogies, nor should we easily find a church, careful to deal with souls, which has not employed them in some form, whether after the Anglican and Lutheran fashion, by confirmation, or in the less formal methods of other Protestant communions, or even by delaying baptism itself until it becomes, for the adult in Christian lands, what it is to the convert from false creeds.

Therefore the Lord called to Moses as he climbed

the steep, and offered through him a formal covenant to the people.

"Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob,* and tell the children of Israel: Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself."

The appeal is to their personal experience and their gratitude: will this be enough? will they accept His yoke, as every convert must, not knowing what it may involve, not yet having His demands specified and His commandments before their eyes, content to believe that whatever is required of them will be good, because the requirement is from God? Thus did Abraham, who went forth, not knowing whither, but knowing that he was divinely guided. "Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine, and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Thus God conveys to them, more explicitly than hitherto, the fact that He is the universal Lord, not ruling one land or nation only, nor, as the Pentateuch is charged with teaching, their tutelary deity among many others. Thus also the seeds are sown in them of a wholesome and rational self-respect, such as the Psalmist felt, who asked "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" yet realised that such mindful-

* This phrase is not found elsewhere in the Pentateuch. Is it fancy which detects in it a desire to remind them of their connection with the least worthy rather than the noblest of the Patriarchs? One would not expect, for instance, to read, Fear not, thou worm Abraham, or even Israel; but the name of Jacob at once calls up humble associations.

ness gave to man a real dignity, made him but little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour.

Abolish religion, and mankind will divide into two classes,—one in which vanity, unchecked by any spiritual superior, will obey no restraints of law, and another of which the conscious pettiness will aspire to no dignity of holiness, and shrink from no dishonour of sin. It is only the presence of a loving God which can unite in us the sense of humility and greatness, as having nothing and yet possessing all things, and valued by God as His "peculiar treasure."*

And with a reasonable self-respect should come a noble and yet sober dignity—"Ye shall be a kingdom of priests," a dynasty (for such is the meaning) of persons invested with royal and also with priestly rank. This was spoken just before the law gave the priesthood into the hands of one tribe; and thus we learn that Levi and Aaron were not to supplant the nation, but to represent it.

Now, this double rank is the property of redeemed humanity: we are "a kingdom and priests unto God." Yet the laity of the Corinthian Church were rebuked for a self-asserting and mutinous enjoyment of their rank: "Ye have reigned as kings without us"; and others there were in this Christian dispensation who "perished in the gainsaying of Korah" (1 Cor. iv. 8; Jude 11).

If the words "He hath made us a kingdom and

* This word is the same which occurs in the verse so beautifully but erroneously rendered "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up My jewels" (Mal. iii. 17, A.V.). "They shall be Mine . . . in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure" (R.V.).

priests" furnish any argument against the existence of an ordained ministry now, then there should have been no Jewish priesthood, for the same words are here. And is it supposed that this assertion only began to be true when the apostles died? Certainly there is a kind of self-assertion in the ministry which they condemn. But if they are opposed to its existence, alas for the Pastoral Epistles! It was because the function belonged to all, that no man might arrogate it who was not commissioned to act on behalf of all.

But while the individual may not assert himself to the unsettling of church order, the privilege is still common property. All believers have boldness to enter into the holiest place of all. All are called upon to rule for God "over a few things," to establish a kingdom of God within, and thus to receive a crown of life, and to sit with Jesus upon His throne. The very honours by which Israel was drawn to God are offered to us all, as it is written, "We are the circumcision," "We are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Phil. iii. 3; Gal. iii. 29).

To this appeal the nation responded gladly. They could feel that indeed they had been sustained by God as the eagle bears her young—not grasping them in her claws, like other birds, but as if enthroned between her wings, and sheltered by her body, which interposed between the young and any arrow of the hunter. Thus, say the Rabbinical interpreters, did the pillar of cloud intervene between Israel and the Egyptians. If the image were to be pressed so far, we could now find a much closer analogy for the eagle "preferring itself to be pierced rather than to witness the death of its young" (Kalisch). But far more tender, and very touching in its domestic homeliness,

is the metaphor of Him Whose discourses teem with allusions to the Old Testament, yet Who preferred to compare Himself to a hen gathering her chickens under her wing.

With the adhesion of Israel to the covenant, Moses returned to God. And the Lord said, "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee for ever."

The design was to deepen their reverence for the Lawgiver Whose law they should now receive; to express by lessons, not more dreadful than the plagues of Egypt, but more vivid and sublime, the tremendous grandeur of Him Who was making a covenant with them, Who had borne them on His wings and called them His firstborn Son, Whom therefore they might be tempted to approach with undue familiarity, were it not for the mountain that burned up to heaven, the voice of the trumpet waxing louder and louder, and the Appearance so fearful that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake" (*τὸ φανταζόμενον*—Heb. xii. 21).

When thus the Deity became terrible, the envoy would be honoured also.

But it is important to observe that these terrible manifestations were to cease. Like the impressions produced by sickness, by sudden deaths, by our own imminent danger, the emotion would subside, but the conviction should remain: they should believe Moses for ever. Emotions are like the swellings of the Nile: they subside again; but they ought to leave a fertilising deposit behind.

That the impression might not be altogether passive, and therefore ephemeral, the people were bidden to "sanctify themselves"; all that is common and secular must be suspended for awhile; and it is worth

notice that, as when the family of Jacob put away their strange gods, so now the Israelites must wash their clothes (cf. Gen. xxxv. 2). For one's vestment is a kind of outer self, and has been with the man in the old occupations from which he desires to purify himself. It was therefore that when Jehu was made king, and when Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph, men put their garments under their chief to express their own subjection (2 Kings ix. 13; Matt. xxi. 7). Much of the philosophy of Carlyle is latent in these ancient laws and usages.

Moreover, the mountain was to be fenced from the risk of profanation by any sudden impulsive movement of the crowd, and even a beast that touched it should be slain by such weapons as men could hurl without themselves pursuing it. Only when the trumpet blew a long summons might the appointed ones come up to the mount (ver. 13).

On the third day, after a soul-searching interval, there were thunders and lightnings, and a cloud, and the trumpet blast; and while all the people trembled, Moses led them forth to meet with God. Again the narrative reverts to the terrible phenomena—the fire like the smoke of a furnace (called by an Egyptian name which only occurs in the Pentateuch), and the whole mountain quaking. Then, since his commission was now to be established, Moses spake, and the Lord answered him with a voice. And when he again climbed the mountain, it became necessary to send him back with yet another warning, whether his example was in danger of emboldening others to exercise their newly given priesthood, or the very excess of terror exercised its well-known fascinating power, as men in a burning ship have been seen to leap into the flames.

And the priests also, who come near to God, should sanctify themselves. It has been asked who these were, since the Levitical institutions were still non-existent (ver. 22, cf. 24). But it is certain that the heads of houses exercised priestly functions; and it is not impossible that the elders of Israel who came to eat before God with Jethro (xviii. 12) had begun to perform religious functions for the people. Is it supposed that the nation had gone without religious services for three months?

It has been remarked by many that the law of Moses appealed for acceptance to popular and even democratic sanctions. The covenant was ratified by a plébiscite. The tremendous evidence was offered equally to all. For, said St. Augustine, "as it was fit that the law which was given, not to one man or a few enlightened people, but to the whole of a populous nation, should be accompanied by awe-inspiring signs, great marvels were wrought . . . before the people" (*De Civ. Dei*, x. 13).

We have also to observe the contrast between the appearance of God on Sinai and His manifestation in Jesus. And this also was strongly wrought out by an ancient father, who represented the Virgin Mary, in the act of giving Jesus into the hands of Simeon, as saying, "The blast of the trumpet does not now terrify those who approach, nor a second time does the mountain, all on fire, cause terror to those who come nigh, nor does the law punish relentlessly those who would boldly touch. What is present here speaks of love to man; what is apparent, of the Divine compassion." (Methodius *De Sym. et Anna*, vii.)

But we must remember that the Epistle to the Hebrews regards the second manifestation as the more

solemn of the two, for this very reason: that we have not come to a burning mountain, or to mortal penalties for carnal irreverence, but to the spiritual mountain Zion, to countless angels, to God the Judge, to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus Christ. If they escaped not, when they refused Him Who warned on earth, much more we, who turn away from Him Who warneth from heaven (Heb. xii. 18-25).

There is a question, lying far behind all these, which demands attention.

It is said that legends of wonderful appearances of the gods are common to all religions; that there is no reason for giving credit to this one and rejecting all the rest; and, more than this, that God absolutely could not reveal Himself by sensuous appearances, being Himself a Spirit. In what sense and to what extent God can be said to have really revealed Himself, we shall examine hereafter. At present it is enough to ask whether human love and hatred, joy and sorrow, homage and scorn can manifest themselves by looks and tones, by the open palm and the clenched fist, by laughter and tears, by a bent neck and by a curled lip. For if what is most immaterial in our own soul can find sensuous expression, it is somewhat bold to deny that a majesty and power beyond anything human may at least be conceived as finding utterance, through a mountain burning to the summit and reeling to the base, and the blast of a trumpet which the people could not hear and live.

But when it is argued that wondrous theophanies are common to all faiths, two replies present themselves. If all the races of mankind agree in believing that there is a God, and that He manifests Himself wonderfully, does that really prove that there is no

God, or even that He never manifested Himself wondrously? We should certainly be derided if we insisted that such a universal belief proved the truth of the story of Mount Sinai, and perhaps we should deserve our fate. But it is more absurd by far to pretend that this instinct, this intuition, this universal expectation that God would some day, somewhere, rend the veil which hides Him, does actually refute the narrative.

We have also to ask for the production of those other narratives, sublime in their conception and in the vast audience which they challenged, sublimely pure alike from taint of idolatrous superstition and of moral evil, profound and far-reaching in their practical effect upon humanity, which deserve to be so closely associated with the giving of the Mosaic law that in their collapse it also must be destroyed, as the fall of one tree sometimes breaks the next. But this narrative stands out so far in the open, and lifts its head so high, that no other even touches a bough of it when overturned.

Is it seriously meant to compare the alleged disappearance of Romulus, or the secret interviews of Numa with his Egeria, to a history like this? Surely one similar story should be produced, before it is asserted that such stories are everywhere.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAW.

xx. 1-17.

WE have now reached that great event, one of the most momentous in all history, the giving of the Ten Commandments. And it is necessary to consider what was the meaning of this event, what part were they designed to play in the religious development of mankind.

1. St. Paul tells us plainly what they did *not* effect. By the works of the law could no flesh be justified: to the father of the Hebrew race faith was reckoned instead of righteousness; the first of their royal line coveted the blessedness not of the obedient but of the pardoned; and Habakkuk declared that the just should live by his faith, while the law is not of faith, and offers life only to the man that doeth these things (Rom. iv. 3, 6; Gal. iii. 12). In the doctrinal scheme of St. Paul there was no room for a compromise between salvation by faith and reliance upon our own performance of any works, even those simple and obvious duties which are of world-wide obligation.

2. But he never meant to teach that a Christian is free from the obligation of the moral law. If it is not true that we can keep it and so earn heaven, it is equally false that we may break it without penalty or

remorse. What he insisted upon was this: that obligation is one thing, and energy is another; the law is good, but it has not the gift of pardon or of inspiration; by itself it will only reveal the feebleness of him who endeavours to perform it, only force into direst contrast the spiritual beauty of the pure ideal and the wretchedness of the sinner, carnal, sold under sin. In this respect, indeed, the law was its own witness. For if, among all the millions of its children, one had lived by obedience, how could he have shared in its elaborate sacrificial apparatus, in the hallowing of the altar from pollution by the national uncleanness, in the sprinkling of the blood of the offering for sin? Take the case of the highest official. A sinless high priest under the law would have been paralysed by his virtue, for his duty on the greatest day of all the year was to make atonement first for his own sins.

3. The law being an authorised statement of what innocence means, and therefore of the only terms upon which a man might hope to live by works, is an organic whole, and we either keep it as a whole or break it. Such is the meaning of the words, he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all; because He who gave the seventh commandment gave also the sixth—so that if one commit no adultery, yet kill, he has become a transgressor of the law in its integrity (James ii. 11). The challenge of God to human self-righteousness is not one which can be half met. If we have not thoroughly kept it, we have thoroughly failed.

4. But this failure of man does not involve any failure, in the law, to accomplish its intended work. It is, as has been said, a challenge. The sense of our inability to meet it is the best introduction to Him Who came not to call the righteous but sinners to

repentance, and thus the law became a tutor to bring men to Christ. It awoke the conscience, brought home the sense of guilt, and entered, that sin might abound in us, whose ignorance had not known sin without it. It was strictly that which Moses most frequently calls it—the Testimony.

5. Finally, however, the teaching of Scripture is not that Christians are condemned to live always in a condition of baffled striving, hopeless longing, conscious transgression of a code which testifies against them. The old and carnal nature gravitates downward, to selfishness and sin, as surely as by a law of the physical universe. But the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus emancipates us from that law of sin and death—the higher nature doing, by the very quality of its life, what the lower nature cannot be driven to do, by dread of hell or by desire of heaven. The creature of earth becomes a creature of air, and is at home in a new sphere, poised on its wings upon the breeze. Love is the fulfilling of the law. And the Christian is free from its dictation, as affectionate men are free from any control of the laws which command the maintenance of wife and child, not because they may defy the statutes, but because their volition and the statutes concide. Liberty is not lawlessness—it is the reciprocal harmony of law and the will.

And thus the grand paradox of Luther is entirely true: "Unless faith be without any, even the smallest works, it does not justify, nay, it is not faith. And yet it is impossible for faith to be without works—earnest, many and great." We are justified by faith without the works of the law, and yet we do not make void the law by faith—nay, we establish the law.

All this agrees exactly with the contrast, so often urged, between the giving of the Law and the utterance of the Sermon on the Mount. The former echoes across wild heights, and through savage ravines; the latter is heard on the grassy slopes of the hillside which overlooks the smiling Lake of Galilee. The one is spoken in thunder and graven upon stone: the other comes from the lips, into which grace is poured, of Him Who was fairer than the children of men. The former repeats again and again the stern warning, "Thou shalt not!" The latter crowns a sevenfold description of a blessedness, which is deeper than joy, though pensive and even weeping, by adding to these abstract descriptions an eighth, which applies them, and assumes them to be realised in His hearers—"Blessed are *ye*." If so much as a beast touched the mountain it should be stoned. But Simeon took the Divine Infant in his arms.

And this is not because God has become gentler, or man worthier: it is because God the Law-giver upon His throne has come down to be God the Helper. But the beatitudes could never have been spoken, if the law had not been imposed: the blessedness of a hunger and thirst for righteousness was created by the majestic and spiritual beauty of the unattained commandment.

Yes, it had a spiritual beauty. For, however formal, external, and even shallow, the commandments may appear to flippant modern babblers, St. Paul bewailed the contrast between the law, which was spiritual, and his own carnal heart. And he, who had kept all the letter from his youth, was only the more vexed and haunted by the fleeting consciousness of a higher "good thing" unattained. Did not one table say

"Thou shalt not covet," and the other promise mercy to thousands of those that love?

This leads us to consider the structure and arrangement of the Decalogue. Scripture itself tells us that there were "ten words" or precepts, written upon both sides of two tables. But various answers have been given at different times, to the question, How shall we divide the ten?

The Jews of a later period made a first commandment of the words, "I am the Lord thy God," which is not a commandment at all. And they restored the proper number, thus exceeded, by uniting in one the prohibition of other gods and of idolatry; although the worship of the golden calf, almost immediately after the law was given, suffices to establish the distinction. For then, as well as under Gideon, Micah and Jeroboam, the sin of idolatry fell short of apostasy to a wholly different god (Judg. viii. 23, 27, xvii. 3, 5; 1 Kings xii. 28). The worship of images dishonours God, even if it be His semblance that they claim. In this arrangement, the tables were allotted five commandments each.

Another curious arrangement was devised, apparently by St. Augustine; and the weight of his authority imposed it upon Western Christianity until the Reformation, and upon the Latin and Lutheran churches unto this day. Like the former, it adds the second commandment to the first, but it divides the tenth. And it gives to the first table three commandments, "since the number of commandments which concern God seem to hint at the Trinity to careful students," while the seven commandments of the second table suggest the Sabbath. Such mystical references are no longer weighty arguments. And the proposed

division of the tenth commandment seems quite precluded by the fact that in Exodus we read, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house nor his wife," while in Deuteronomy the order is reversed; so that its advocates are divided among themselves as to whether the coveting of a house or a wife is to attai the dignity of separate mention.

The ordinary English arrangement assigns to th e tables four commandments and six respectively. And the noble catechism of the Church of England appears to sanction this arrangement by including among "my duties to my neighbour" that of loving, honouring and succouring my father and mother. There are several objections to this arrangement. It is unsymmetrical. There seems to be something more sacred and divine about my relationship with my father and mother than those which connect me with my neighbour. The first table begins with the gravest offence, and steadily declines to the lowest; sin against the unique personality of God being followed by sin against His spirituality of nature, His name, and His holy day. If now the sin against His earthly representative, the very fountain and sanction of all law to childhood, be added to the first table, the same order will pervade those of the second—namely, sin against my neighbour's life, his family, his property, his reputation, and lastly, his interest in my inner self, in the wishes that are unspoken, the thoughts and feelings which

"I wad nae tell to nae man."

We thus obtain both the simplest division and the clearest arrangement. In Roman xiii. 9 the fifth commandment is not enumerated when rehearsing the actions which transgress the second table. In the

Hebrew text of Deuteronomy all the later commandments are joined with the sixth by the copulative (represented along with the negative fairly enough in our English by "Neither"), which seems to indicate that these five were united together in the author's mind. But the fifth stands alone, like all those of the first table. Now, it is clear that such an arrangement gives great sanction and weight to the sacred institution of the family.

Finally, the comprehensiveness and spirituality of the law may be observed in this; that the first table forbids sin against God in thought, word and deed; and the second table forbids sin against man in deed, word and thought.

THE PROLOGUE.

xx. 2.

The Decalogue is introduced by the words "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Here, and in the previous chapter, is already a great advance upon the time when it was said to them "The God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath appeared." Now they are expected to remember what He has done for themselves. For, although religion must begin with testimony, it ought always to grow up into an experience. Thus it was that many of the Samaritans believed on Jesus because of the word of the woman; but presently they said, "Now we believe, not because of thy speaking, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know." And thus the disciples who heard John the Baptist speak, and so followed Jesus, having come and seen where He abode, could say, "We have found the Messiah."

This prologue is vitally connected with both tables of the law. In relation to the first, it recognises the instinct of worship in the human heart. In vain shall we say Do not worship idols, until the true object of adoration is supplied, for the heart must and will prostrate itself at some shrine. A leader of modern science confesses "the immovable basis of the religious sentiment in the nature of man," adding that "to yield this sentiment reasonable satisfaction is the problem of problems at the present hour."* It is indeed a problem for the unbelief which, because it professes to be scientific, cannot shut its eyes to the fact that men whose faith in Christ has suffered shipwreck are everywhere seen to be clinging to strange planks—spiritualism, esoteric Buddhism, and other superstitions,—which prove that man must and will reverence something more than streams of tendencies, or beneficial results to the greatest numbers. The Law of Moses abolishes superstition by no mere negation, but by the proclamation of a true God.

Moreover, it declares that this God is knowable, which flatly contradicts the brave assertion of modern agnostics that the notion of a God is not even "thinkable." That assertion is a bald and barren platitude in the only sense in which it is not contrary to the experience of all mankind. As we cannot form a complete and perfect, nor even an adequate notion of God, so no man ever yet conceived a complete and adequate notion of his neighbour, nor indeed of himself. But as we can form a notion of one another, dim and

* Prof. Tyndall, *Belfast Address*, p. 60. What progress has scientific unbelief made since 1874 in solving this "question of questions for the present hour"? It has perfected the phonograph, but it has not devised a creed.

fragmentary indeed, yet more or less accurate and fit to guide our actions, so has every nation and every man formed some notion of deity. Nor could even the agnostic declare that God is unthinkable, unless the word God, of which he makes this assertion, conveyed to him *some* idea, some thought, more or less worthy of the thinking. The ancient Jew never dreamed that he could search out the Almighty to perfection, yet God was known to him by His actions (the only means by which we know our fellow-men); and the combined terror and loving-kindness of these at once warned him against revolt, and appealed to his loyalty for obedience.

In relation to the second table, the prologue was both an argument and an appeal. Why should a man hope to prosper by estranging his best Friend, his Emancipator and Guide? And even if disobedience could obtain some paltry advantage, how base would he be who snatched at it, when forbidden by the God Who broke his chains, and brought him out of the house of bondage—a Benefactor not ungenial and remote, but One Who enters into closest relations with him, calling Himself "Thy God"!

Now, a greater emancipation and a closer personal relationship belong to the Church of Christ. When a Christian hears that God is unthinkable, he ought to be able to answer, 'God is my God, and He has brought my soul out of its house of bondage.'

Moreover, his emancipation by Christ from many sins and inner slaveries ought to be a fact plain enough to constitute the sorest of problems to the observing world.

It must be observed, besides, that the Law, which was the centre of Judaism, does not appeal chiefly to

the meaner side of human nature. Hell is not yet known, for the depths of eternity could not be uncovered before the clouds had rolled away from its heights of love and condescension; or else the sanity and balance of human nature would have been overthrown. But even temporal judgments are not set in the foremost place. As St. Paul, who knew the terrors of the Lord, more commonly and urgently besought men by the mercies of God, so were the ancient Jews, under the burning mountain, reminded rather of what God had bestowed upon them, than of what He might inflict if they provoked Him. And our gratitude, like theirs, should be excited by His temporal as well as His spiritual gifts to us.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt have none other gods before Me."—xx. 3.

When these words fell upon the ears of Israel, they conveyed, as their primary thought, a prohibition of the formal worship of rival deities, Egyptian or Sidonian gods. Following immediately upon the proclamation of Jehovah, their own God, they declared His intolerance of rivalry, and enjoined a strict and jealous monotheism. For God was a reality. Races who worshipped idealisations or personifications might easily make room for other poetic embodiments of human thought and feeling; but Jehovah would vindicate His rights. He had proved himself very real in Egypt. Other gods would not displace Him: He would observe them: they would be "before Me."* God does not quit the scene when man forgets Him.

* "Or *beside Me*" (R.V.) The preposition is so vague that either of our English words may suggest quite too definite a meaning, as

Now, it is hard for us to realise the charm which the worship of false gods possessed for ancient Israel. To comprehend it we must reflect upon the universal ignorance which made every phenomenon of nature a portentous manifestation of mysterious and varied power, which they could by no means trace back to a common origin, while the crash and discord of the results appeared to indicate opposing wills behind. We must reflect how closely akin is awe to worship, and how blind and unintelligent was the awe which storm and earthquake and pestilence then excited. We must remember the pressure upon them of surrounding superstitions armed with all the civilisation and art of their world. Above all, we must consider that the gods which seduced them were not of necessity supreme: homage to them was very fairly consistent with a reservation of the highest place for another; so that false worship in its early stages need not have been much more startling than belief in witchcraft, or in the paltry and unimaginative "spirits" which, in our own day, are reputed to play the banjo in a dark room, and to untie knots in a cabinet. Is it for us to deride them?

To oppose all such tendencies, the Lord appealed not to philosophy and sound reason. These are not the parents of monotheism: they are the fruit of it. And so is our modern science. Its fundamental principle is faith in the unity of nature, and in the extent to which the same laws which govern our little world reach through the vast universe. And that faith is directly traceable to the conviction that all the universe is the work of the same Hand.

when "before Me" is made to mean "in My angry eyes," or "beside Me" is taken to hint at resentment for intrusion upon the same throne

"One God, one law, one element;"—the preaching of the first was sure to suggest the other two. Nor could any race which believed in a multitude of gods labour earnestly to reduce various phenomena to one cause. Monotheism is therefore the parent of correct thinking, and could not draw its sanctions thence. No: the law appeals to the historical experience of Israel; it is content to stand and fall by that; if they acknowledged the claim of God upon their loyalty, all the rest followed. Their own story made good this claim. And so does the whole story of the Church, and the whole inner life of every man who knows anything of himself, bear witness to the religion of Jesus.

Never let us weary of repeating that while we have ample controversial resource, while no missile can pierce the chain-armour of the Christian evidences, connected and interwoven into a great whole, and while the infidelity which is called scientific is really infidel only so far as it begs its case (which is an unscientific thing to do), nevertheless the strength of our position is experimental. If the experience which testifies to Jesus were historical alone, I might refuse to give it credit: if it were only personal, I might ascribe it to enthusiasm. But as long as a great cloud of living witnesses, and all the history of the Church, declare the reality of His salvation, while I myself feel the sufficiency of what He offers (or else the bitter need of it), so long the question is not between conflicting theories, but between theories and facts. To have another god is to place him beside One Whom we already have, and Who has wrought for us the great emancipation. It is not an error in theological science: it is ingratitude and treason.

But it very soon became evident that men could apostatise from God otherwise than in formal worship, chant and sacrifice and prostration: "This people honoureth me with their mouths, but their hearts are far from Me." God asks for love and trust, and our litanies should express and cultivate these. Whatever steals away these from the Lord is really His rival, and another god. "What is it to have a God? or what is God?" Luther asks. And he answers, "He is God, and is so called, from Whose goodness and power thou dost confidently promise all good things to thyself, and to Whom thou dost fly from all adverse affairs and pressing perils. So that to have a God is nothing else than to trust Him and believe in Him with all the heart, even as I have often alleged that the reliance of the heart constitutes alike one's God and one's idol. . . . In what thing soever thou hast thy mind's reliance and thine heart fixed, that is beyond doubt thy God" (*Larger Catechism*).

And again: "What sort of religion is this, to bow not the knees to riches and honour, but to offer them the noblest part of you, the heart and mind? It is to worship the true God outwardly and in the flesh, but the creature inwardly and in spirit" (*X. Præcepta Witt. Prædicata*).

It was on this ground that he included charms and spells among the sins against this commandment, because, though "they seem foolish rather than wicked, yet do they lead to this too grave result, that men learn to rely upon the creature in trifles, and so fail in great things to rely upon God" (*Ibid.*)

This view of false worship is frequent in Scripture itself. The Chaldeans were idolaters of an elaborate and imposing ritual, but their true deities were not to

be found in temples. They adored what they really trusted upon, and that was their military prowess—the god of the modern commander, who said that Providence sided with the big battalions. The Chaldean is "he whose might is his god," whereas the sacred warrior has the Lord for his strength and shield and very present help in battle. Nay, regarding men "as the fishes of the sea," and his own vast armaments as the fisher's apparatus to sweep them away, the Chaldean, it is said, "sacrificeth unto his net, and burneth incense unto his drag; because by them his portion is fat and his meat plenteous" (Hab. i. 11, 14-16). Multitudes of humbler people practise a similar idolatry. They say to God "Give us this day our daily bread"; but they really ascribe their maintenance to their profession or their trade; and so this is the true object of their homage. They, too, burn incense to their drag.

Others had no thought of a higher blessedness than animal enjoyment. Their god was their belly. They set the excitement of wine in the place of the fulness of the Spirit, or preferred some depraved union upon earth to the honour of being one spirit with the Lord (Phil. iii. 19; Eph. v. 18; 1 Cor. vi. 16, 17). And some tried to combine the world and righteousness; not to lose heaven while grasping wealth, and receiving here not only good things, but the only good things they acknowledged—*their* good things (Luke xvi. 25). As the Samaritans feared the Lord and served graven images, so these were fain to serve God and mammon (2 Kings xvii. 41; Matt. vi. 24).

Now, these departures from the true Centre of all love and Source of all light were really a homage to His great rival, "the god of this world." Whenever

men seek to obtain any prize by departing from God they do reverence to him who falsely said of all the kingdoms of the earth, and their glory, "These things are delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give them." They deny Him to Whom indeed all power is committed in heaven and earth.

What is the remedy, then, for all such formal or virtual apostasies? It is to "have" the true God—which means, not only to know and confess, but to be in real relationship with Him.

Despite His so-called self-sufficiency, man is not very self-sufficing, after all. The vast endowments of Julius Cæsar did not prevent him from chafing because, at the age when he was still obscure, Alexander had conquered the world. To be Julius Cæsar was not enough for him. Nor is any man able to stand alone. In the Old Testament Joshua said, "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve,"—implying that they must obey some one and will do better to choose a service than to drift into one (Josh. xxiv. 15). And in the New Testament Jesus declared that no man can serve two masters; but added that he would not break with both and go free, he was sure to love and cleave to one of them. Now, he only is proof against apostasy, who has realised the wants of the soul within him, and the powerlessness of all creatures to satisfy or save, and then, turning to the cross of Christ, has found his sufficiency in Him. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of everlasting life." Marvellous it is to think that underneath the stern words "Thou shalt have none other," lies all the condescension of the privilege "Thou shalt have . . . Me."

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, . . . thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them."—xx. 4-6.

How far does the second of these clauses modify the first? Men there are who maintain the severe independence of the former, so that it forbids the presence of any image or likeness in the house of God, even for innocent purposes of adornment. But the Decalogne is not a liturgical directory: what it forbids in church it forbids anywhere; and on this theory the statues in Parliament Square would be idolatrous, as well as those in Westminster Abbey. And such Christians are more Judaical than the Jews, who were taught to place in the very Holy of Holies golden cherubim overshadowing the mercy-seat, and to represent them again upon its curtains.

It is therefore plain that the precept never forbade imagery, but idolatry, which is the making of images to satisfy the craving of men's hearts for a sensuous worship—the making of them "unto thee." The second clause qualifies and elucidates the first. And what the commandment prohibits is any attempt to help our worship by representing the object of adoration to the senses.

The higher and more subtle idolatries do not conceive that wood or gold is actually transformed into their deities; but only that the deities are locally present in the images, which express their attributes—power in a hundred hands, beneficence in a hundred breasts. But in thus expressing, they degrade and cramp the conception.

They may perhaps evade the reproach of Isaiah that they warm themselves with a portion of timber, and

roast meat with another portion, and make the remainder a god (Isa. xliv. 15-17), by urging that the timber is not the god, but an abode which he chooses because it expresses his specific qualities. But they cannot evade the reproach of St. Paul, that being ourselves the offspring of God, we ought not to compare Him to the workmanship of our hands, graven with art and man's device (Acts xvii. 29).

A truly spiritual worship is intellectually as well as morally the most elevating exercise of the soul, which it leads onward and upward, making of all that it knows and thinks a vestibule, beyond which lie higher knowledge and deeper feeling as yet unattained.

Why is Gothic architecture better adapted for religious buildings than any Grecian or Oriental style? Because its long aisles, vaulted roofs and pointed arches, leading the vision up to the unseen, tell of mystery, and draw the mind away beyond the visible and concrete to something greater which it hints; while rounded arches and definite proportions shut in at once the vision and the mind. The difference is the same as between poetry and logic.

And so it is with worship. We fetter and cramp our thoughts of deity when we bind them to even the loftiest conceptions which have ever been shut up in marble or upon canvas. The best image that ever took shape is inferior to the poorest spiritual conception of God, in this respect if in no other—that it has no expansiveness, it cannot grow. And in connecting our prayers with it, we virtually say, 'This satisfies my conception of God.'

It is not to be condemned merely as inadequate, for so are all our highest thoughts of deity; nor only because average humanity (which is supposed to stand

most in need of the help and suggestion of art) will never learn the fine distinctions by which subtle intellects withhold from the image itself the worship which it evokes, and which goes out in its direction. It is still more mischievous because, even for the trained theologian, it is the petrifaction of what is meant to develop and expand, the solidification of the inadequate, the accepting of what is human as our idea of the divine.

Nor will it long continue to be merely inadequate. Experience proves that ideas, like air and water, cannot be confined without stagnating. Idolatries not only fail to develop, they degenerate; and systems, however orthodox they may appear at starting, which connect worship with palpable imagery, are doomed to sink into superstition.

To this precept there is added a startling and painful caution—"For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." That a man should be jealous is no passport to our friendship: we think of unreasonable estrangements, exaggerated demands, implacable and cruel resentments. It would not enter the average mind to doubt that one is highly praised when another says of him, 'I never traced in his words or actions the slightest stain of jealousy.' And yet we are to think of God Himself as the jealous God.

Upon reflection, however, we must admit that a man is not condemned as jealous-minded because he is capable of jealousy, but because he has an unjust and unreasonable tendency towards it. It is a narrowing and suspicious quality when it operates without due cause, a vindictive and cruel one when it operates in excessive measure. But what should we think of a parent who felt no jealousy if the heart of his child

were stolen from him by intriguing servants or by frivolous comrades? Now, God has called Israel His son, even His firstborn. The truth is that with us jealousy is dangerous and frequently perverted, because we are bad judges of the measure of our own rights, especially when our affections are involved. But some measure of jealousy is the necessary pain of love neglected, love wronged or slighted by those upon whom it has a claim. Jealousy is the shadow thrown where the sunshine of love is intercepted, and it is strong in proportion to the strength of the light. It operates in the heart exactly like the sense of justice in the reason. Justice expects a recompense where it has given service, and jealousy asks for love where it has given affection.

And therefore, when God tells us that He is jealous, He implies that He condescends to love us, to look for a return, to desire more from us than outward service. We cannot be jealous concerning things which are indifferent to us. Even the jealousy of rival competitors for business or for place may be measured by the desire of each for that which the other would engross. The politician is not jealous of the millionaire, nor the capitalist of the prime minister.

Now, if God is jealous when the enemies of our soul would steal away our loyalty, it surely follows that we shall not be left to contend with those enemies alone: He values us; He is upon our side; He will help us to overcome them.

And now we begin to see why this attribute is connected with the second commandment and not the first. The apostate who betakes himself to another god is almost beyond the reach of this tender and intimate emotion: he is still loved, for God loves all

men; but yet perhaps the chord is unstrung which trembles responsive to this plaintive note.

When a man who confesses God begins to weary of spiritual intercourse with the Lord of spirits, when he can no longer worship One whose actual presence is realised because His voice is heard within, when the likeness of man or brute, or brightness of morning, or marvel of life or its reproductiveness, contents him as a representation of God the invisible, then his heart is beginning to go after the creature, to content itself with artistic loveliness or majesty, to let go the grasp as upon a living hand, by which alone the soul may be sustained when it stumbles, or guided when it would err.

To those who are within His covenant—to us, therefore, as to His ancient Israel—He says, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." Because I am "thy God."

The assertion of a Divine jealousy is but one difficulty of this remarkable verse. The Lord goes on to describe Himself as "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments." And is this reasonable? To punish the child, to be avenged upon the children's children, for sins which are not their own? We know how often the sceptic has made gain out of this representation—which is but his own unauthorised gloss, since in reality God has said nothing about punishing the righteous with the wicked. It is not true that all sad and disastrous consequences are penal; many are disciplinary, and even to the people of God some are surgical, cutting away what would lead to disease

and death. Are no evil consequences probable, if men brought up amid scenes dishonouring to God were treated exactly like those who have since childhood felt as it were the hand of a Father upon their head? For themselves it is best and kindest that so deep a loss could come home to their consciousness in pain.

At all events, the assertion so early made in Scripture is confirmed in all the experience of the race. Insanity, idiocy, scrofula, consumption, are too often, though not always, the hereditary results of guilt. Sins of the flesh are visited upon the bodily system. Sins of the temper, such as pride, cynicism and frivolity, are felt in the mental structure of the race. And the sins which offend directly against God, do they bring no results with them? Ask of the investigators of the new science of heredity and transmitted peculiarities, whether it stops short of the highest and holiest parts of human nature. Or consider the ravages which victory and consequent wealth have made, again and again, in the character of whole nations.

There is no doctrine impugned in Scripture, which men have less prospect of shaking off, even if they close their Bibles for ever, than this. If it were not there, we should be perplexed at a want of conformity between the ways of God in nature and what is asserted of Him in His Book.

But it is either slander or blindness to represent this law, viewed in its entirety, as other than benevolent. The transmission of the result of evil is only a part of the vast law which has bound men together in nations and families, as partners and members with each other. It is clear that distinctive advantages cannot be bestowed upon the children of the good, as

such, unless the same advantages be withheld from the evil race beside them. If the prizes of a university are won by knowledge, the result is that ignorance is "visited," in the withholding of them. And if, in the vaster university of life, health, affluence, good repute and a clear intellect are the transmitted results of virtue, then disease, poverty, neglect and incompetence become the dire bequest of the unrighteous.

There is no choice, therefore, except either to carry out this law, or else to bid every man in the world begin life, not as "the heir of all the ages," but absolutely destitute of all that has been acquired by his fellow-men.

Sometimes a hint is given us of what this would be. There is brought occasionally into civilised communities, from the depths of forests, a creature without language or decency or intellect, with low forehead and brutal appetites, who in his early childhood had wandered away and been lost,—brought up, men say, by the strange compassion of some lower creature, and now sunken well-nigh to its level. To this degradation we should all come, if it were not for the transmitted inheritance of our fathers. And so vast is the upward force of this grand law, that it is steadily though slowly upheaving the whole mass; and the lowest of to-day, visited for ancestral failings by sinking to the bottom, is higher than if he had been left absolutely alone.

This over-weight of good is clearly seen by comparing the clauses, for the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation, but mercy is shown in them that love God upon a wholly different scale. Even "unto thousands" would enormously counterbalance three generations. But

the Revised Version rightly suggests "a thousand generations" in the margin, and supports it by one of its very rare references. It is plainly stated in Deuteronomy vii. 9, that He "keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments unto a thousand generations."

Lastly, it is to be observed that in all this passage the gospel is shining through the law. It is not a question of just dealing, but of emotion. God is not a master exacting taskwork, but a Father, jealous if we refuse our hearts. He visits sin upon the posterity "of them that hate," not only of them that disobey Him. And when our hearts sink, we who are responsible for generations yet to be, as we reflect upon our frailty, our ignorance and our sins, upon the awful consequences which may result from one heedless act—nay, from a gesture or a look—He reminds us that He does not requite those who serve Him only with a measured wage, but shows "mercy" upon those who love Him unto a thousand generations.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."—xx 7.

What is the precise force of this prohibition? The word used is ambiguous: sometimes it must be rendered as here, as in the verses "*Vain* is the help of man," and "Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but *vain* that build it" (Psalm cviii. 12, cxxvii. 1). But sometimes it clearly means false, as in the texts "Thou shalt not raise a *false* report," and "swearing *falsely* in making a covenant" (Exod. xxiii. 1; Hos. x. 4). Yet again, it hangs midway between the two ideas, as when we read of "*lying*

vanities," and again, "trusting in vanity and speaking *lies*" (Psalm xxxi. 6; Isa. lix. 4).

In favour of the rendering "falsely" it is urged that our Lord quotes it as "said to them of old time 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself'" (Matt. v. 33). But it is by no means clear that He quotes this text: the citation is closer to the phraseology of Lev. xix. 12, and it is found in a section of the Sermon which does not confine its citations to the Decalogue (cf. ver. 38).

The Authorised rendering seems the more natural when we remember that civic duty had not yet come upon the stage. When we have learned to honour only one God, and not to degrade nor materialise our conception of Him, the next step is to inculcate, not yet veracity toward men when God has been invoked, but reverence, in treating the sacred name.

We have already seen the miserable superstitions by which the Jews endeavoured to satisfy the letter while outraging the spirit of this precept. In modern times some have conceived that all invocation of the Divine Name is unlawful, although St. Paul called God for a witness upon his soul, and the strong angel shall yet swear "by Him Who liveth for ever and ever" (2 Cor. i. 23; Rev. x. 6).

As it is not a temple but a desert which no foot ever treads, so the sacred name is not honoured by being unspoken, but by being spoken aright.

Swearing is indeed forbidden, where it has actually disappeared, namely, in the mutual intercourse of Christian people, whose affirmation should suffice their brethren, while the need of stronger sanctions "cometh of evil," even of the consciousness of a tendency to untruthfulness, which requires the stronger barrier of an oath. But our Lord Himself, when adjured by the

living God, responded to the solemn authority of that adjuration, although His death was the result.

The name of God is not taken in vain when men who are conscious of His nearness, and act with habitual reference to His will, mention Him more frequently and familiarly than formalists approve. It is abused when the insincere and hollow professor joins in the most solemn act of worship, honours Him with the lips while the heart is far from Him —nay, when one strives to curb Satan, and reclaim his fellow-sinner, by the use of good and holy phrases, in which his own belief is merely theoretical; and fares like the sons of Sceva, who repeated an orthodox adjuration, but fled away overpowered and wounded. Or if the truth unworthily spoken assert its inherent power, that will not justify the hollowness of his profession, and in vain will he plead at last, "Lord, Lord, have we not in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name done many marvellous acts?"

The only safe rule is to be sure that our conception of God is high and real and intimate; to be habitually humble and trustful in our attitude toward Him; and then to speak sincerely and frankly, as then we shall not fail to do. The words which rise naturally to the lips of men who think thus cannot fail to do Him honour, for out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh.

And the prevalent notion that God should be mentioned seldom and with bated breath is rather an evidence of men's failure habitually to think of Him aright, than of filial and loving reverence. There is a large and powerful school of religion in our own day, whose disciples talk much more of their own emotions and their own souls than St. Paul did, and much less

about God and Christ. Some day the proportions will be restored. In the great Church of the future men will not morbidly shrink from confessing their inner life, but neither will it be the centre of their contemplation and their discourse: they will be filled with the fulness of God; out of the abundance of their hearts their mouths will speak; His name shall be continually in their mouth, and yet they shall not take the name of the Lord their God in vain.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

xx. 8-11.

It cannot be denied that the commandment to honour the Sabbath day occupies a unique place among the ten. It is, at least apparently, a formal precept embedded in the heart of a moral code, and good men have thought very differently indeed about its obligation upon the Christian Church.

The great Continental reformers, Lutheran and Calvinistic alike, who subscribed the Confession of Augsburg, there affirmed that "Scripture hath abolished the Sabbath by teaching that all Mosaic ceremonies may be omitted since the gospel has been revealed" (II. vii. 28). The Scotch reformers, on the other hand, declared that God "in His Word, by a positive moral and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him" (*Westminster Confess.*, XXI. vii.). They are even so bold as to declare that this day "from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week"; but this

proposition would be as hard to prove as the contrary assertion, still maintained by some obscure religionists, that the change of day, for however sufficient and sublime a reason, was beyond the capacity of the Church of Christ to enact.

Amid these conflicting opinions the doctrinal formularies of the Church of England are characteristically guarded and prudent; but her worshippers are bidden to seek mercy from the Lord for past violations of this law, and an inclination of heart to keep it in the future; and when the Ten have been recited, they pray that "all these Thy laws" may be written upon their hearts. There is no doubt, therefore, about the opinion of our own Reformers concerning the divine obligation of the commandment.

In examining the problem thus presented to us, our chief light must be that of Scripture itself. Is the Sabbath what the Lutheran confession called it, a mere "Mosaic ceremony," or does it rest upon sanctions which began earlier and lasted longer than the precept to abstain from shell-fish, or to sanctify the first-born of cattle?

Does its presence in the Decalogue disfigure that great code, as the intrusion of these other precepts would do? When we find a Gentile church reminded that the next precept to this "is the first commandment with promise" (Eph. vi. 2), can we suppose that the tables to which St. Paul appealed, and the promise which he cited at full length, were both cancelled; that in so far as a moral element existed in them, that portion of course survived their repeal, but the code itself was gone? If so, the temporal promise went with it, and its quotation by St. Paul is strange. Strange also, upon this supposition, was the stress

which he habitually laid upon the law as a convicting power, and as being only repealed in the letter so far as it was fulfilled by the spontaneous instinct of love, which was the fulfilling of the law.

The position of the commandment among a number of moral and universal duties cannot but weigh heavily in its favour. It prompts us to ask whether our duty to God is purely negative, to be fulfilled by a policy of non-intervention, not worshipping idols, nor blaspheming. Something more was already intimated in the promise of mercy to them "that love Me." For love is chiefly the source of active obedience: while fear is satisfied by the absence of provocation, love wants not only to abstain from evil but to do good. And how may it satisfy this instinct when its object is the eternal God, Who, if He were hungry, would not tell us? It finds the necessary outlet in worship, in adoring communion, in the exclusion for awhile of worldly cares, in the devotion of time and thought to Him. Now, the foundation upon which all the institutions of religion may be securely built, is the day of rest. Call it external, formal, unspiritual if you will; say that it is a carnal ordinance, and that he who keeps it in spirit is free from the obligation of the letter. But then, what about the eighth commandment? Are we absolved also from the precept "Thou shalt not steal," because it too is concerned with external actions, because "this . . . thou shalt not steal . . . and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this one saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"? Do we say, the spirit has abolished the letter: love is the rescinding of the law? St. Paul said the very opposite: love is the fulfilling of the law, not its destruction; and thus

he re-echoed the words of Jesus, "I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil."

All men know that the formal regulations which defend property are relaxed as the ties of love and mutual understanding are made strong; that to enter unannounced is not a trespass, that the same action which will be prosecuted as a theft by a stranger, and resented as a liberty by an acquaintance, is welcomed as a graceful freedom, almost as an endearment, by a friend. And yet the commandment and the rights of property hold good: they are not compromised, but glorified, by being spiritualised. As it is between man and his brother, so should it be between us and our Divine Father. We have learned to know Him very differently from those who shuddered under Sinai: the whole law is not now written upon tables of stone, but upon fleshly tables of the heart. But among the precepts which are thus etherialised and yet established, why should not the fourth commandment retain its place? Why should it be supposed that it must vanish from the Decalogue, unless the gathering of sticks deserves stoning? The institution, and the ceremonial application of it to Jewish life, are entirely different things; just as respect for property is a fixed obligation, while the laws of succession vary.

Bearing this distinction in mind, we come to the question, Was the Sabbath an ordinance born of Mosaism, or not? Grant that the word "Remember," if it stood alone, might conceivably express the emphasis of a new precept, and not the recapitulation of an existing one. Grant also that the mention in Genesis of the Divine rest might be made by anticipation, to be read with an eye to the institution which would be mentioned later. But what is to be made of the

fact that on the seventh day manna was withheld from the camp, before they had arrived at Horeb, and therefore before the commandment had been written by the finger of God upon the stone? Was this also done by anticipation? Upon any supposition, it aimed at teaching the nation that the obligation of the day was not based upon the positive precept, but the precept embodied an older and more fundamental obligation.

How is the Sabbath spoken of in those prophecies which set least value upon the merely ceremonial law?

Isaiah speaks of mere ritual as slightly as St. Paul. To fast and afflict one's soul is nothing, if in the day of fasting one smites with the fist and oppresses his labourers. To loose the bonds of wickedness, to free the oppressed, to share one's bread with the hungry, this is the fast which God has chosen, and for him who fasts after this fashion the light shall break forth like sunrise, and his bones shall be strong, and he himself like an unfailing water-spring. Now, it is the same chapter which thus waives aside mere ceremonial in contempt, which lavishes the most ample promises on him who turns away his foot from the Sabbath, and calls the Sabbath a delight, and the holy of the Lord, honourable, and honours it (Isa. lviii. 5-11, 13-14).

There is no such promise in Jeremiah, for the observance of any merely ceremonial law, as that which bids the people to honour the Sabbath day, that there may enter into their gates kings and princes riding in chariots and upon horses, and that the city may remain for ever (Jer. xvii. 24, 25).

And Ezekiel declares that in the day when God made Himself known to His people in the land of Egypt, He gave them statutes and judgments and His sabbaths (Ezek. xx. 11, 12). Now, this phrase is a clear

allusion to the word of God in Jeremiah, that "I spake not unto their fathers in the day when I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices, but this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto My voice," etc. (Jer. vii. 23). And it sharply contrasts the sacredness of God's abiding ordinances with the temporary institutions of the sanctuary. But it reckons the Sabbath among the former.

It is objected that our Lord Himself treated the Sabbath lightly, as a worn-out ordinance. But He was "a minister of the circumcision," and always discussed the lawfulness of His Sabbath miracles as a Jew with Jews. Thus He argued that men, admittedly under the law, baked the shewbread, circumcised children, and even rescued cattle from jeopardy upon the seventh day. He appealed to the example of David, who met a sufficiently urgent necessity by eating the consecrated bread, "which was not lawful for him to eat" (Matt. xii. 4).

He did not hint that the law of the sabbath had disappeared, but insisted that it was meant to serve man and not to oppress him: that "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark ii. 27).

Now, there is not in the life of Christ an assertion, so broad and strong as that the Sabbath was made for the human race, which can be narrowed down to a discussion of any merely local and temporary institution. He Who stood highest, and saw the widest horizons, declared that the Sabbath was intended for humanity, and not for a section or a sect of it. Not because He was the King of the Jews, but because He was the Son of Man, the ripe fruit and the leader of the world-wide race which it was given to bless, therefore He was also its Lord.

And in Him, so are we. Like all things present and things to come, it is our help, we are not its slaves.

There is something abject in the notion of a Christian freeman, who has been for a long week imprisoned in some gloomy and ill-ventilated workshop, whose lungs would be purified, and therefore his spirits uplifted, and therefore his reason and his affections invigorated, and therefore his worship rendered more fresh, warm and reasonable, by the breathing of a purer air, yet whose conception of a day of rest is so slavish that he dares not "rest" from the pollution of an infected atmosphere, and from the closeness of a London court, because he conceives it imperative to "rest" only from that bodily exercise, to enjoy which would be to him the most real and the most delightful repose of all.

But there are other things more abject still; and one of them is the miserable insincerity of the affluent and luxurious, using the exceptional case of him whose week-days are thus oppressed, to excuse their own wanton neglect of religious ordinances, accepting at the hands of Christianity the sacred holiday, but ignoring utterly the fact that the Lord sanctified and hallowed it, that it is to be called the holy of the Lord, and to be honoured, and that we are free from the letter of the precept only in so far as we rise to the spirit of it, in loving and true communion with the Father of spirits.

Another utterance of Jesus throws a strong light upon the nature and the limits of our obligation. "My Father worketh even until now, and I work" (John v. 17) is an appeal to the fact that in the long sabbath of God His world is not deserted; creation may be suspended, but the bounties of Providence go on;

and therefore Christ also felt that His day of rest was not one of torpor, that in healing the impotent man upon the Sabbath He was but following the example of Him by whose rest the day was sanctified. All works of beneficent love, all that ministers to human recovery from anguish, and carries out the Divine purposes of grace for body or soul, rescue from danger, healing of disease, reformation of guilt, are sanctioned by this defence of Christ.

They need not plead that the commandment is abrogated, but that Jesus of Nazareth, of the seed of David, found nothing in such liberties inconsistent with the duties of a devout Hebrew.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

"**Honour thy father** and thy mother: that thy days **may be long upon the land** which the Lord thy God giveth thee."—**xx. 12.**

This commandment forms a kind of bridge between the first table and the second. Obedience to parents is not merely a neighbourly virtue; we do not honour them simply as our fellow-men: they are the vice-gerents of God to our childhood; through them He supplies our necessities, defends our feebleness, and pours in light and wisdom upon our ignorance; by them our earliest knowledge of right and wrong is imparted, and upon the sanction of their voice it long depends.

It is clear that parental authority cannot be undermined, nor filial disobedience and irreverence gain ground, without shaking the foundations of our religious life, even more perhaps than of our social conduct.

Accordingly this commandment stands before the

sixth, not because murder is a less offence against society, but because it is more emphatically against our neighbour, and less directly against God.

The human infant is dependent and helpless for a longer period, and more utterly, than the young of any other animal. Its growth, which is to reach so much higher, is slower, and it is feebler during the process. And the reason of this is plain to every thoughtful observer. God has willed that the race of man should be bound together in the closest relationships, both spiritual and secular; and family affection prepares the heart for membership alike of the nation and the Church. With this inner circle the wider ones are concentric. The pathetic dependence of the child nourishes equally the strong love which protects, and the grateful love which clings. And from our early knowledge of human generosity, human care and goodness, there is born the capacity for belief in the heart of the great Father, from Whom every family in heaven and earth derived its Greek name of Fatherhood (Eph. iii. 15).

Woe to the father whose cruelty, selfishness, or evil passions make it hard for his child to understand the Archetype, because the type is spoiled! or whose tyranny and self-will suggest rather the stern God of reprobation, or of servile, slavish subjection, than the tender Father of freeborn sons, who are no more under tutors and governors, but are called unto freedom.

But how much sorer woe to the son who dishonours his earthly parent, and in so doing slays within himself the very principle of obedience to the Father of spirits!

No earthly tie is perfect, and therefore no earthly obedience can be absolute. Some crisis comes in every life when the most innocent and praiseworthy affection

becomes a snare—when the counsel we most relied upon would fain mislead our conscience—when a man, to be Christ's disciple, must "hate father and mother," as Christ Himself heard the temptation of the evil one speaking through chosen and beloved lips, and said "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Even then we shall respect them, and pray as Christ prayed for His failing apostle, and when the storm has spent itself they shall resume their due place in the loving heart of their Christian offspring.

So Jesus, when Mary would interrupt His teaching, said "Who is My mother?" But imminent death could not prevent Him from pitying her sorrow, and committing her to His beloved disciple as to a son.

From the letter of this commandment streams out a loving influence to sanctify all the rest of our relationships. As the love of God implies that of our brother also, so does the honour of parents involve the recognition of all our domestic ties.

And even unassisted nature will tend to make long the days of the loving and obedient child; for life and health depend far less upon affluence and luxury than upon a well-regulated disposition, a loving heart, a temper which can obey without chafing, and a conscience which respects law. All these are being learned in disciplined and dutiful households, which are therefore the nurseries of happy and righteous children, and so of long-lived families in the next generation also. Exceptions there must be. But the rule is clear, that violent and curbless lives will spend themselves faster than the lives of the gentle, the loving, the law-abiding and the innocent.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt do no murder."—xx. 13.

We have now clearly passed to the consideration of man's duty to his fellow-man, as a part of his duty to his Maker. It is no longer as holding a divinely appointed relation to us, but simply as he is a man, that we are bidden to respect his person, his family, his property, and his fair fame.

And the influence of the teaching of our Lord is felt in the very name which we all give to the second table of the law. We call it "our duty to our neighbour." But we do not mean to imply that there lives on the surface of the globe one whom we are free to assault or to pillage. The obligation is universal, and the name we give it echoes the teaching of Him who said that no man can enter the sphere of our possible influence, even as a wounded creature in a swoon whom we may help, but he should thereupon become our neighbour. Or rather, we should become his; for while the question asked of Him was "Who is my neighbour?" (whom should I love?) Jesus reversed the problem when He asked in turn not To whom was the wounded man a neighbour? but Who was a neighbour unto him? (who loved him?)

Social ethics, then, have a religious sanction. It is the constant duty and effort of the Church of God to saturate the whole life of man, all his conduct and his thought, with a sense of sacredness; and as the world is for ever desecrating what is holy, so is religion for ever consecrating what is secular.

In these latter days men have thought it a proof of grace to separate religion from daily life. The Antinomian, who maintains that his orthodox beliefs

or feelings absolve him from the obligations of morality, joins hands with the Italian brigand who hopes to be forgiven for cutting throats because he subsidises a priest. The enthusiast who insists that all sins, past and future, were forgiven him when he believed, approaches far nearer than he supposes to the fanatic of another creed, who thinks a formal confession and an external absolution sufficient to wash away sin. All of them hold the grand heresy that one may escape the penalties without being freed from the power of evil; that a life may be saved by grace without being penetrated by religion, and that it is not exactly accurate to say that Jesus saves His people from their sins.

It is scarcely wonderful, when some men thus refuse to morality the sanctions of religion, that others propose to teach morality how she may go without them. In spite of the experience of ages, which proves that human passions are only too ready to defy at once the penalties of both worlds, it is imagined that the microscope and the scalpel may supersede the Gospel as teachers of virtue; that the self-interest of a creature doomed to perish in a few years may prove more effectual to restrain than eternal hopes and fears; and that a scientific prudence may supply the place of holiness. It has never been so in the past. Not only Judæa, but Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were strong as long as they were righteous, and righteous as long as their morality was bound up in their religion. When they ceased to worship they ceased to be self-controlled, nor could the most urgent and manifest self-interest, nor all the resources of lofty philosophy, withhold them from the ruin which always accompanies or follows vice.

Is it certain that modern science will fare any better? So far from deepening our respect for human nature and for law, she is discovering vile origins for our most sacred institutions and our deepest instincts, and whispering strange means by which crime may work without detection and vice without penalty. Never was there a time when educated thought was more suggestive of contempt for one's self and for one's fellow-man, and of a prudent, sturdy, remorseless pursuit of self-interest, which may be very far indeed from virtuous. The next generation will eat the fruit of this teaching, as we reap what our fathers sowed. The theorist may be as pure as Epicurus. But the disciples will be as the Epicureans.

Is there anything in the modern conception of a man which bids me spare him, if his existence dooms me to poverty and I can quietly push him over a precipice? It is quite conceivable that I can prove, and very likely indeed that I can persuade myself, that the shortening of the life of one hard and grasping man may brighten the lives of hundreds. And my passions will simply laugh at the attempt to restrain me by arguing that great advantages result from the respect for human life upon the whole. Appetites, greeds, resentments do not regard their objects in this broad and colourless way; they grant the general proposition, but add that every rule has its exceptions. Something more is needed: something which can never be obtained except from a universal law, from the sanctity of all human lives as bearing eternal issues in their bosom, and from the certainty that He who gave the mandate will enforce it.

It is when we see in our fellow-man a divine creature

of the Divine, made by God in His own image, marred and defaced by sin, but not beyond recovery, when his actions are regarded as wrought in the sight of a Judge Whose presence supersedes utterly the slightness, heat and inadequacy of our judgment and our vengeance, when his pure affections tell us of the love of God which passeth knowledge, when his errors affright us as dire and melancholy apostacies from a mighty calling, and when his death is solemn as the unveiling of unknown and unending destinies, then it is that we discern the sacredness of life, and the awful presumption of the deed which quenches it. It is when we realise that he is our brother, holding his place in the universe by the same tenure by which we hold our own, and dear to the same Father, that we understand how stern is the duty of repressing the first resentful movements within our breast which would even wish to crush him, because they are a rebellion against the Divine ordinance and against the Divine benevolence.

Is it asked, how can all this be reconciled with the lawfulness of capital punishment? The death penalty is frequent in the Mosaic code. But Scripture regards the judge as the minister and agent of God. The stern monotheism of the Old Testament "said, Ye are Gods," to those who thus pronounced the behest of Heaven; and private vengeance becomes only more culpable when we reflect upon the high sanction and authority by which alone public justice presumes to act.

Now, all these considerations vanish together, when religion ceases to consecrate morality. The judgment of law differs from my own merely as I like it better, and as I am a party (perhaps unwillingly) to the general consent which creates it; he whom I would

assail is doomed in any case to speedy and complete extinction; his longer life is possibly burdensome to himself and to society; and there exists no higher Being to resent my interference, or to measure out the existence which I think too protracted. It is clear that such a view of human life must prove fatal to its sacredness; and that its results would make themselves increasingly felt, as the awe wore away which old associations now inspire.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."—xx. 14.

This commandment follows very obviously from even the rudest principle of justice to our neighbour. It is among those that St. Paul enumerates as "briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

And therefore nothing need here be said about the open sin by which one man wrongs another. Wild and evil theories may be abroad, new schemes of social order may be recklessly invented and discussed; yet, when the institution of the permanent family is assailed, every thoughtful man knows full well that all our interests are at stake in its defence, and the nation could no more survive its overthrow than the Church.

But when our Lord declared that to excite desire through the eyes is actually this sin, already ripe, He appealed to some deeper and more spiritual consideration than that of social order. What He pointed to is the sacredness of the human body—so holy a thing that impurity, and even the silent excitement of passion, is a wrong done to our nature, and a dishonour to the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Now, this is a subject upon which it is all the more necessary to write, because it is hard to speak about.

What is the human body, in the view of the Christian? It is the one bond, as far as we know in all the universe, between the material and the spiritual worlds, one of which slopes thence down to inert molecules, and the other upward to the throne of God.

Our brain is the engine-room and laboratory whereby thought, aspiration, worship express themselves and become potent, and even communicate themselves to others.

But it is a solemn truth that the body not only interprets passively, but also influences and modifies the higher nature. The mind is helped by proper diet and exercise, and hindered by impure air and by excess or lack of food. The influence of music upon the soul has been observed at least since the time of Saul. And hereafter the Christian body, redeemed from the contagion of the fall, and promoted to a spiritual impressibility and receptiveness which it has never yet known, is meant to share in the heavenly joys of the immortal spirit before God. This is the meaning of the assertion that it is sown a natural (= *soulish*) body, but shall be raised a spiritual body. In the meantime it must learn its true function. Whatever stimulates and excites the animal at the cost of the immortal within, will in the same degree cloud and obscure the perception that a man's life consisteth not in his pleasures, and will keep up the illusion that the senses are the true ministers of bliss. The soul is attacked through the appetites at a point far short of their physical indulgence. And when lawless wishes are deliberately toyed with, it is clear that lawless acts are not hated, but only avoided through fear of consequences. The reins which govern the life are no longer in the hands of the spirit, nor is

it the will which now refuses to sin. How, then, can the soul be alert and pure? It is drugged and stupified: the offices of religion are a dull form, and its truths are hollow unrealities, assented to but unfelt, because unholy impulses have set on fire the course of nature, in what should have been the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Moreover, the Christian life is not one of mere submission to authority; its true law is that of ceaseless upward aspiration. And since the union of husband and wife is consecrated to be the truest and deepest and most far-reaching of all types of the mystical union between Christ and His Church, it demands an ever closer approach to that perfect ideal of mutual love and service.

And whatever impairs the sacred, mysterious, all-pervading unity of a perfect wedlock is either the greatest of misfortunes or of crimes.

If it be frailty of temper, failure of common sympathies, an irretrievable error recognised too late, it is a calamity which may yet strengthen the character by evoking such pity and helpfulness as Christ the Bridegroom showed for the Church when lost. But if estrangement, even of heart, come through the secret indulgence of lawless reverie and desire, it is treason, and criminal although the traitor has not struck a blow, but only whispered sedition under his breath in a darkened room.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt not steal."—xx. 15.

There is no commandment against which human ingenuity has brought more evasions to bear than this.

Property itself is theft, says the communist. "It is no grave sin," says the Roman text-book, "to steal in moderation"; and this is defined to be, "from a pauper less than a franc, from a daily labourer less than two or three, from a person in comfortable circumstances anything under four or five francs, or from a very rich man ten or twelve francs. And a servant whom force or necessity compels to accept an unjust payment, may secretly compensate himself, because the workman is worthy of his hire." * A moment's reflection discovers this to be the most naked rationalism, choosing some of the commandments of God for honour, and some for contempt as "not very grave," and wholly ignoring the principle that whoever attacks the code at any one point "is guilty of all," because he has despised it as a code, as an organic system.

Nothing is easier than to confuse one's conscience about the ethics of property. For the arrangements of various nations differ: it is a geographical line which defines the right of the elder son against his brothers, of sons against daughters, and of children against a wife; and the demand is still more capricious which the state asserts against them all, under the name of succession duty, and which it makes upon other property in the form of a multitude of imposts and taxes. Can all these different arrangements be alike binding? Add to this variability the immense national revenues, which are apparently so little affected by individual contributions, and it is no wonder if men fail to see that honesty to the public is a duty as immutable and stern as any other duty to their neighbour. Unfortunately the evil spreads. The

* Gury, Compend., i., secs. 607, 623.

same considerations which make it seem pardonable to rob the nation apply also to the millionaire; and they tempt many a poor man to ask whether he need respect the wealth of a usurer, or may not adjust the scales of Mine and Thine, which law causes to hang unfairly.

It is forgotten that a nation has at least the same authority as a club to regulate its own affairs, to fix the relative position and the subscription of its members. Common honesty teaches me that I must conform to these rules or leave the club; and this duty is not at all affected by the fact that other associations have different rules. In three such societies God Himself has placed us all—the family, the Church, and the nation; and therefore I am directly responsible to God for due respect to their laws. It is not true that the statute-book is inspired, any more than that the regulations of a household are divinely given. Yet a Divine sanction, such as rests upon the parental rule of fallible human creatures, hallows also national law. I may advocate a change in laws of which I disapprove, but I am bound in the meantime to obey the conditions upon which I receive protection from foreign foes and domestic fraud, and which cannot be subjected to the judgment of every individual, except at the cost of a dissolution of society, and a state of anarchy compared with which the worst of laws would be desirable.

This revolt of the individual is especially tempting when selfishness deems itself wronged, as by the laws of property. And the eighth commandment is necessary to protect society not merely against the violence of the burglar and the craft of the impostor, but also against the deceitfulness of our own hearts, asking What harm is in the evasion of an impost? What

right has a successful speculator to his millions? Why should I not do justice to myself when law refuses it?

There is always the simple answer, Who made me a judge in my own case?

But when we regard the matter thus, it becomes clear that honesty is not mere abstinence from pillage. The community has larger claims than this upon us, and is wronged if we fail to discharge them.

The rich man robs the poor if he does not play his part in the great organisation by which he is served so so well: every one robs the community who takes its benefits and returns none; and in this sense the bold saying is true, that every man lives by one of two methods—by labour or by theft.

St. Paul does not exhort men to refrain from theft merely in order to be harmless, but to do good. That is the alternative contemplated when he says, "Let the thief steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need" (Eph. iv. 28).

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."—xx. 16.

St. James called the tongue a world of iniquity. And against its lawlessness, which inflames the whole course of nature, each table of the law contains a warning. For it is equally ready to profane the name of God, and to rob our neighbour of his fair fame.

Jesus Christ regarded verbal professions as a very poor thing, and asked, "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I command you? He

aimed a parable at the hollowness of merely saying, "I go, sir." But, worthless though such phrases be, the act which substitutes professions for actual service is no trifle; and our Lord felt the importance of words, empty or sincere, so profoundly as to stake upon this one test the eternal destinies of His people: "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Now, the tongue is thus important because it is so prompt and willing a servant of the mind within. We scarcely think of it as a servant at all: our words do not seem to be more than "expressions," manifestations of what is within us.

But a thought, once expressed, is transformed and energetic as a bullet when the charge is fired; it modifies other minds, and the word which we took to be far less potent than a deed becomes the mover of the fateful deeds of many men. And thus, being at once powerful and unsuspected, it is the most treacherous and subtle of all the forces which we wield.

And the ninth commandment does not undertake to bridle it by merely forbidding us in a court of justice to wrong our fellow-man by perjury.

We transgress it whenever we conceive a strong suspicion and repeat it as a thing we know; when we allow the temptation of a biting epigram to betray us into an unkind expression not quite warranted by the facts; when we vindicate ourselves against a charge by throwing blame where it probably but not certainly ought to lie; or when we are not content to vindicate ourselves without bringing a countercharge which it would perplex us to be asked to prove; when we give way to that most shallow and meanest of all attempts at cleverness which claims credit for

penetration because it can discover base motives for innocent actions, so that high-mindedness becomes pride, and charity withers up into love of patronising, and forbearance shrivels into lack of spirit. The pattern and ideal of such cleverness is the east wind, which makes all that is fair and sensitive to shut itself up, forbids the bud to expand into a blossom, and puts back the coming of the springtime and of the singing bird.

There are very gifted persons who have never found out that a kindly and winning phrase may have as much literary merit as a stinging one, and it is quite as fine a thing to be like the dew on Hermon as to shoot out arrows, even bitter words.

It is a pity that our harsh judgments always speak more loudly and confidently than our kindly ones, but the reason is plain: angry passion prompts the former, and its voice is loud; while the calm reflection which tones down and sweetens the judgment softens also the expression of it.

It has to be remembered, also, that false witness can reach to nations, organisations, political movements as well as individuals. The habit of putting the worst construction upon the intentions of foreign powers is what feeds the mutual jealousies that ultimately blaze out in war. The habit of thinking of rival politicians as deliberately false and treasonable is what lowers the standard of the noblest of secular pursuits, until each party, not to be undone, protests too much, raises its voice to a falsetto to scream its rival down, and relaxes its standard of righteousness lest it should be outdone by the unscrupulousness of its rival.

And there is yet another neighbour, against whom

false witness is woefully rife, both in the Church and in society. That neighbour is mankind at large. There is a prevalent theory of human sinfulness which unconsciously scoffs at the appeals of the gospel, striving indeed to influence me by love, gratitude, admiration for the Perfect One, and desire to be like Him, by the hope of holiness and the shame of vileness, but telling me at the same time that I have no sympathies whatever except with evil. The observation of every day shows that man's nature is corrupt, but it also shows that he is not a fiend—that he has fallen indeed, but remembers yet in what image he was made. But the world cannot upbraid the Church for these exaggerations, since they are but the echo of its own.

"I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things, hopes which will not deceive,
And virtues which are merciful, nor weave
Snares for the failing; I would also deem
O'er others griefs that some sincerely grieve;
That two, or one, are almost what they seem,
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream.
Childe Harold, III., cxiv.

Cynicism is false witness; and if it does not greatly wrong any one of our fellow-men, it injures both society and the cynic. If he is of a coarse fibre, it excuses him to himself in becoming the hard and unloving creature which he fancies that all men are. If he is too proud or too self-respecting to yield to this temptation, it isolates him, it chills and withers his sympathies for people quite as good as himself, whom he thinks of as the herd.

As for the more flagrant sins, so for this, the remedy

is love. Love sympathises, makes allowance for frailty, discovers the germs of good, hopeth all things, taketh not account of evil.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt not covet . . . anything that is his."—xx. 17.

It will be remembered that the order of the catalogue of objects of desire is different in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. In the latter "thy neighbour's wife" is first, as of supreme importance; and therefore it has been thought possible to convert it into a separate commandment.

But this the order in Exodus forbids, by placing the house first, and then the various living possessions which the householder gathers around him. What is thought of is the gradual process of acquisition, and the right of him who wins first a house, then a wife, servants, and cattle, to be secure in the possession of them all. Now, between foes, we saw that the evil temper is what leads to the evil deed, and the man who nurses hatred is a murderer at heart. Just so the householder is not rendered safe, and certainly not happy in the enjoyment of his rights, by the seventh commandment and the eighth, unless care be taken to prevent the accumulation of those forces which will some day break through them both. To secure cities against explosion, we forbid the storage of gunpowder and dynamite, and not only the firing of magazines.

But the moral law is not given to any man for his neighbour's sake chiefly. It is for me: statutes whereby I myself may live. And as the Psalmist pondered on them, they expanded strangely for his

perception. "I have kept Thy testimonies," he says: but presently asks to be quickened,—"So shall I *observe* the testimony of Thy mouth,"—and prays, "Give me understanding, that I may *know* Thy testimonies." And at the last, he confesses that he has "gone astray like a lost sheep" (Ps. cxix. 22, 88, 125, 176). Starting with a literal innocence, he comes to feel a deep inward need, need of vitality to obey, and even of power to understand aright. If the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, it follows that they are a spirit, and inward loyalty is the necessary condition upon which external obedience can be accepted. The cheers of a traitor, the flattery of one who scorns, the ritual of a hypocrite, these are quite as valuable, as indications of what is within, as a reluctant relinquishment to my neighbour of what is his. I must not covet. Plainly this is the sharpest and most searching precept of all; and accordingly St. Paul asserts that without this he would not have suffered the deep internal discontent, the consciousness of something wrong, which tortured him, even although no mortal could reproach him, even though, touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless. He had not known coveting, except the law had said "Thou shalt not covet."

Here, then, we perceive with the utmost clearness what St. Paul so clearly discerned—the true meaning of the Law, its convicting power, its design to work not righteousness, but self-despair as the prelude of self-surrender. For who can, by resolving, govern his desires? Who can abstain not only from the usurping deed, but from the aggressive emotion? Who will not despair when he learns that God desireth truth in the inward parts? But this despair is the way to that better hope which adds, "In the hidden part Thou shalt

make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."

And as a strong interest or affection has power to destroy in the soul many weaker ones, so the love of God and our neighbour is the appointed way to overcome the desire of taking from our neighbour what God has given to him, refusing it to us.

THE LESSER LAW.

xx. 18—xxiii. 33.

With the close of the Decalogue and its universal obligations, we approach a brief code of laws, purely Hebrew, but of the deepest moral interest, confessed by hostile criticism to bear every mark of a remote antiquity, and distinctly severed from what precedes and follows by a marked difference in the circumstances.

This is evidently the book of the Covenant to which the nation gave its formal assent (xxiv. 7), and is therefore the germ and the centre of the system afterwards so much expanded.

And since the adhesion of the people was required, and the final covenant was ratified as soon as it was given, before any of the more formal details were elaborated, and before the tabernacle and the priesthood were established, it may fairly claim the highest and most unique position among the component parts of the Pentateuch, excepting only the Ten Commandments.

Before examining it in detail, the impressive circumstances of its utterance have to be observed.

It is written that when the law was given, the voice of the trumpet waxed louder and louder still. And as the multitude became aware that in this tempestuous

and growing crash there was a living centre, and a voice of intelligible words, their awe became insufferable: and instead of needing the barriers which excluded them from the mountain, they recoiled from their appointed place, trembling and standing afar off. "And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us and we will hear, but let not God speak with us lest we die." It is the same instinct that we have already so often recognised, the dread of holiness in the hearts of the impure, the sense of unworthiness, which makes a prophet cry, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" and an apostle, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man."

Now, the New Testament quotes a confession of Moses himself, well-nigh overwhelmed, "I do exceedingly fear and quake" (Heb. xii. 21). And yet we read that he "said unto the people, Fear not, for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not" (xx. 20). Thus we have the double paradox,—that he exceedingly feared, yet bade them fear not, and yet again declared that the very object of God was that they might fear Him.

Like every paradox, which is not a mere contradiction, this is instructive.

There is an abject fear, the dread of cowards and of the guilty, which masters and destroys the will—the fear which shrank away from the mount and cried out to Moses for relief. Such fear has torment, and none ought to admit it who understands that God wishes him well and is merciful.

There is also a natural agitation, at times inevitable though not unconquerable, and often strongest in the highest natures because they are the most finely strung. We are sometimes taught that there is sin in that

instinctive recoil from death, and from whatever brings it close, which indeed is implanted by God to prevent foolhardiness, and to preserve the race. Our duty, however, does not require the absence of sensitive nerves, but only their subjugation and control. Marshal Saxe was truly brave when he looked at his own trembling frame, as the cannon opened fire, and said, "Aha! tremblest thou? thou wouldest tremble much more if thou knewest whither I mean to carry thee to-day." Despite his fever-shaken nerves, he was perfectly entitled to say to any waverer, "Fear not."

And so Moses, while he himself quaked, was entitled to encourage his people, because he could encourage them, because he saw and announced the kindly meaning of that tremendous scene, because he dared presently to draw near unto the thick darkness where God was.

And therefore the day would come when, with his noble heart aflame for a yet more splendid vision, he would cry, "O Lord, I beseech Thee show me Thy glory"—some purer and clearer irradiation, which would neither baffle the moral sense, nor conceal itself in cloud.

Meanwhile, there was a fear which should endure, and which God desires: not panic, but awe; not the terror which stood afar off, but the reverence which dares not to transgress. "Fear not, for God is come to prove you" (to see whether the nobler emotion or the baser will survive), "and that His fear may be before your faces" (so as to guide you, instead of pressing upon you to crush), "that ye sin not."

How needful was the lesson, may be seen by what followed when they were taken at their word, and the pressure of physical dread was lifted off them. "They

soon forgat God their Saviour . . . they made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the work of their own hands." Perhaps other pressures which we feel and lament to-day, the uncertainties and fears of modern life, are equally required to prevent us from forgetting God.

Of the nobler fear, which is a safeguard of the soul and not a danger, it is a serious question whether enough is alive among us.

Much sensational teaching, many popular books and hymns, suggest rather an irreverent use of the Holy Name, which is profanation, than a filial approach to a Father equally revered and loved. It is true that we are bidden to come with boldness to the throne of Grace. Yet the same Epistle teaches us again that our approach is even more solemn and awful than to the Mount which might be touched, and the profaning of which was death; and it exhorts us to have grace whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe, "for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. iv. 16, xii. 28). That is the very last grace which some Christians ever seem to seek.

When the people recoiled, and Moses, trusting in God, was brave and entered the cloud, they ceased to have direct communion, and he was brought nearer to Jehovah than before.

What is now conveyed to Israel through him is an expansion and application of the Decalogue, and in turn it becomes the nucleus of the developed law. Its great antiquity is admitted by the severest critics; and it is a wonderful example of spirituality and searching depth, and also of such germinal and fruitful principles as cannot rest in themselves, literally applied, but must lead the obedient student on to still better things.

It is not the function of law to inspire men to obey

it; this is precisely what the law could not do, being weak through the flesh. But it could arrest the attention and educate the conscience. Simple though it was in the letter, David could meditate upon it day and night. In the New Testament we know of two persons who had scrupulously respected its precepts, but they both, far from being satisfied, were filled with a divine discontent. One had kept all these things from his youth, yet felt the need of doing some good thing, and anxiously demanded what it was that he lacked yet. The other, as touching the righteousness of the law, was blameless, yet when the law entered, sin revived and slew him. For the law was spiritual, and reached beyond itself, while he was carnal, and thwarted by the flesh, sold under sin, even while externally beyond reproach.

This subtle characteristic of all noble law will be very apparent in studying the kernel of the law, the code within the code, which now lies before us.

Men sometimes judge the Hebrew legislation harshly, thinking that they are testing it, as a Divine institution, by the light of this century. They are really doing nothing of the sort. If there are two principles of legislation dearer than all others to modern Englishmen, they are the two which these flippant judgments most ignore, and by which they are most perfectly refuted.

One is that institutions educate communities. It is not too much to say that we have staked the future of our nation, and therefore the hopes of humanity, upon our conviction that men can be elevated by ennobling institutions,—that the franchise, for example, is an education as well as a trust.

The other, which seems to contradict the first, and does actually modify it, is that legislation must not

move too far in advance of public opinion. Laws may be highly desirable in the abstract, for which communities are not yet ripe. A constitution like our own would be simply ruinous in Hindostan. Many good friends of temperance are the reluctant opponents of legislation which they desire in theory but which would only be trampled upon in practice, because public opinion would rebel against the law. Legislation is indeed educational, but the danger is that the practical outcome of such legislation would be disobedience and anarchy.

Now, these principles are the ample justification of all that startles us in the Pentateuch.

Slavery and polygamy, for instance, are not abolished. To forbid them utterly would have substituted far worse evils, as the Jews then were. But laws were introduced which vastly ameliorated the condition of the slave, and elevated the status of woman—laws which were far in advance of the best Gentile culture, and which so educated and softened the Jewish character, that men soon came to feel the letter of these very laws too harsh.

That is a nobler vindication of the Mosaic legislation than if this century agreed with every letter of it. To be vital and progressive is a better thing than to be correct. The law waged a far more effectual war upon certain evils than by formal prohibition, sound in theory but premature by centuries. Other good things besides liberty are not for the nursery or the school. And "we also, when we were children, were held in bondage" (Gal. iv. 3).

It is pretty well agreed that this code may be divided into five parts. To the end of the twentieth chapter it deals directly with the worship of God. Then follow

thirty-two verses treating of the personal rights of man as distinguished from his rights of property. From the thirty-third verse of the twenty-first chapter to the fifteenth verse of the twenty-second, the rights of property are protected. Thence to the nineteenth verse of the twenty-third chapter is a miscellaneous group of laws, chiefly moral, but deeply connected with the civil organisation of the state. And thence to the end of the chapter is an earnest exhortation from God, introduced by a clearer statement than before of the manner in which He means to lead them, even by that mysterious Angel in Whom "is My Name."

Part I.—The Law of Worship.

xx. 22-26.

It is no vain repetition that this code begins by reasserting the supremacy of the one God. That principle underlies all the law, and must be carried into every part of it. And it is now enforced by a new sanction,—"Ye yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven: ye shall not make *other gods* with Me; gods of silver or gods of gold ye shall not make unto you (vers. 22, 23). The costliest material of this low world should be utterly contemned in rivalry with that spiritual Presence revealing Himself out of a wholly different sphere; and in so far as they remembered Him, and the Voice which had thrilled their nature to its core, in so far would they be free from the desire for any carnal and materialised divinity to go before them.

Impressed with such views of God, their service of Him would be moulded accordingly (24, 25). It is

true that nothing could be too splendid for His sanctuary, and Bezaleel was presently to be inspired, that the work of the tabernacle might be worthy of its destination. Spirituality is not meanness, nor is art without a consecration of its own. But it must not intrude too closely upon the solemn act wherein the soul seeks the pardon of the Creator. The altar should not be a proud structure, richly sculptured and adorned, and offering in itself, if not an object of adoration, yet a satisfying centre of attention for the worshipper. It should be simply a heap of sods. And if they must needs go further, and erect a more durable pile, it must still be of materials crude, inartistic, such as the earth itself affords, of unhewn stone. A golden casket is fit to convey the freedom of some historic city to a prince, but the noblest offering of man to God is too humble to deserve an ostentatious altar.

"If thou lift up a tool upon it thou hast polluted it:" it has lost its virginal simplicity; it no longer suits a spontaneous offering of the heart, it has become artificial, sophisticated, self-conscious, polluted.

It is vehemently urged that these verses sanction a plurality of altars (so that one might be of earth and another of stone), and recognise the lawfulness of worship in other places than at a central appointed shrine. And it is concluded that early Judaism knew nothing of the exclusive sanctity of the tabernacle and the temple.

This argument forgets the circumstances. The Jews had been led to Horeb, the mount of God. They were soon to wander away thence through the wilderness. Altars had to be set up in many places, and might be of different materials. It was an important

announcement that in every place where God would record His name He would come unto them and bless them. But certainly the inference leans rather toward than against the belief that it was for Him to select every place which should be sacred.

The last direction given with regard to worship is a homely one. It commands that the altar must not be approached with steps, lest the clothes of the priest should be disturbed and his limbs uncovered. Already we feel that we have to reckon with the temper as well as the letter of the precept. It is divinely unlike the frantic indecencies of many pagan rituals. It protests against all infractions of propriety, even the slightest, such as even now discredit many a zealous movement, and bear fruit in many a scandal. It rebukes all misdemeanour, all forgetfulness in look and gesture of the Sacred Presence, in every worshipper, at every shrine.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LESSER LAW (continued).

PART II.—RIGHTS OF THE PERSON.

xxi. 1-32.

The first words of God from Sinai had declared that He was Jehovah Who brought them out of slavery. And in this remarkable code, the first person whose rights are dealt with is the slave. We saw that a denunciation of all slavery would have been premature, and therefore unwise; but assuredly the germs of emancipation were already planted by this giving of the foremost place to the rights of the least of all and the servant of all.

As regards the Hebrew slave, the effect was to reduce his utmost bondage to a comparatively mild apprenticeship. At the worst he should go free in the seventh year; and if the year of jubilee intervened, it brought a still speedier emancipation. If his debt or misconduct had involved a family in his disgrace, they should also share his emancipation, but if while in bondage his master had provided for his marriage with a slave, then his family must await their own appointed period of release. It followed that if he had contracted a degrading alliance with a foreign slave, his freedom would inflict upon him the pang

of final severance from his dear ones. He might, indeed, escape this pain, but only by a deliberate and humiliating act, by formally renouncing before the judges his liberty, the birthright of his nation ("they are My servants, whom I brought forth out of Egypt, they shall not be sold as bondservants"—Lev. xxv. 42), and submitting to have his ear pierced, at the doorpost of his master's house, as if, like that, his body were become his master's property. It is uncertain, after this decisive step, whether even the year of jubilee brought him release; and the contrary seems to be implied in his always bearing about in his body an indelible and degrading mark. It will be remembered that St. Paul rejoiced to think that his choice of Christ was practically beyond recall, for the scars on his body marked the tenacity of his decision (Gal. vi. 17). He wrote this to Gentiles, and used the Gentile phrase for the branding of a slave. But beyond question this Hebrew of Hebrews remembered, as he wrote, that one of his race could incur lifelong subjection only by a voluntary wound, endured because he loved his master, such as he had received for love of Jesus.

When the law came to deal with assaults it was impossible to place the slave upon quite the same level as the freeman. But Moses excelled the legislators of Greece and Rome, by making an assault or chastisement which killed him upon the spot as worthy of death as if a freeman had been slain. It was only the victim who lingered that died comparatively unavenged (20, 21). After all, chastisement was a natural right of the master, because he owned him ("he is his money"); and it would be hard to treat an excess of what was permissible, inflicted perhaps under

provocation which made some punishment necessary, on the same lines with an assault that was entirely lawless. But there was this grave restraint upon bad temper,—that the loss of any member, and even of the tooth of a slave, involved his instant manumission. And this carried with it the principle of moral responsibility for every hurt (*26, 27*).

It was not quite plain that these enactments extended to the Gentile slave. But in accordance with the assertion that the whole spirit of the statutes was elevating, the conclusion arrived at by the later authorities was the generous one.

When it is added that man-stealing (upon which all our modern systems of slavery were founded) was a capital offence, without power of commutation for a fine (xxi. 16), it becomes clear that the advocates of slavery appeal to Moses against the outraged conscience of humanity without any shadow of warrant either from the letter or the spirit of the code.

There remains to be considered a remarkable and melancholy sub-section of the law of slavery.

In every age degraded beings have made gain of the attractions of their daughters. With them, the law attempted nothing of moral influence. But it protected their children, and brought pressure to bear upon the tempter, by a series of firm provisions, as bold as the age could bear, and much in advance of the conscience of too many among ourselves to-day.

The seduction of any unbetrothed maiden involved marriage, or the payment of a dowry. And thus one door to evil was firmly closed (xxii. 16).

But when a man purchased a female slave, with the intention of making her an inferior wife, whether for himself or for his son (such only are the purchases

here dealt with, and an ordinary female slave was treated upon the same principles as a man), she was far from being the sport of his caprice. If indeed he repented at once, he might send her back, or transfer her to another of her countrymen upon the same terms, but when once they were united she was protected against his fickleness. He might not treat her as a servant or domestic, but must, even if he married another and probably a chief wife, continue to her all the rights and privileges of a wife. Nor was her position a temporary one, to her damage, as that of an ordinary slave was, to his benefit.

And if there was any failure to observe these honourable terms, she could return with unblemished reputation to her father's home, without forfeiture of the money which had been paid for her (xxi. 7-11).

Does any one seriously believe that a system like the African slave trade could have existed in such a humane and genial atmosphere as these enactments breathed? Does any one who knows the plague spot and disgrace of our modern civilisation suppose for a moment that more could have been attempted, in that age, for the great cause of purity? Would to God that the spirit of these enactments were even now respected! They would make of us, as they have made of the Hebrew nation unto this day, models of domestic tenderness, and of the blessings in health and physical vigour which an untainted life bestows upon communities.

By such checks upon the degradation of slavery, the Jew began to learn the great lesson of the sanctity of manhood. The next step was to teach him the value of life, not only in the avenging of murder, but also in the mitigation of such revenge. The blood-feud was too

old, too natural a practice to be suppressed at once; but it was so controlled and regulated as to become little more than a part of the machinery of justice.

A premeditated murder was inexpiable, not to be ransomed; the murderer must surely die. Even if he fled to the altar of God, intending to escape thence to a city of refuge when the avenger ceased to watch, he should be torn from that holy place: to shelter him would not be an honour, but a desecration to the shrine (xxi. 12, 14). According to this provision Joab and Adonijah suffered. For the slayer by accident or in hasty quarrel, "a place whither he shall flee" would be provided, and the vague phrase indicates the antiquity of the edict (ver. 13). This arrangement at once respected his life, which did not merit forfeiture, and provided a penalty for his rashness or his passion.

It is because the question in hand is the sanctity of man, that the capital punishment of a son who strikes or curses a parent, the vicegerent of God, and of a kidnapper, is interposed between these provisions and minor offences against the person (15-17).

Of these latter, the first is when lingering illness results from a blow received in a quarrel. This was not a case for the stern rule, eye for eye and tooth for tooth,—for how could that rule be applied to it?—but the violent man should pay for his victim's loss of time, and for medical treatment until he was thoroughly recovered (18, 19).

But what is to be said to the general law of retribution in kind? Our Lord has forbidden a Christian, in his own case, to exact it. But it does not follow that it was unjust, since Christ plainly means to instruct private persons not to exact their rights, whereas the magistrate continues to be "a revenger to execute

justice." And, as St. Augustine argued shrewdly, "this command was not given for exciting the fires of hatred, but to restrain them. For who would easily be satisfied with repaying as much injury as he received? Do we not see men slightly hurt athirst for slaughter and blood? . . . Upon this immoderate and unjust vengeance, the law imposed a just limit, not that what was quenched might be kindled, but that what was burning might not spread." (Cont. Faust, xix. 25.)

It is also to be observed that by no other precept were the Jews more clearly led to a morality still higher than it prescribed. Their attention was first drawn to the fact that a compensation in money was nowhere forbidden, as in the case of murder (Num. xxxv. 31). Then they went on to argue that such compensation must have been intended, because its literal observance teemed with difficulties. If an eye were injured but not destroyed, who would undertake to inflict an equivalent hurt? What if a blind man destroyed an eye? Would it be reasonable to quench utterly the sight of a one-eyed man who had only destroyed one-half of the vision of his neighbour? Should the right hand of a painter, by which he maintains his family, be forfeited for that of a singer who lives by his voice? Would not the cold and premeditated operation inflict far greater mental and even physical suffering than a sudden wound received in a moment of excitement? By all these considerations, drawn from the very principle which underlay the precept, they learned to relax its pressure in actual life. The law was already their schoolmaster, to lead them beyond itself (*vide* Kalisch *in loco*).

Lastly, there is the question of injury to the person wrought by cattle.

It is clearly to deepen the sense of reverence for human life, that not only must the ox which kills a man be slain, but his flesh may not be eaten; thus carrying further the early aphorism "at the hand of every beast will I require . . . your blood" (Gen. ix. 5). This motive, however, does not betray the lawgiver into injustice: "the owner of the ox shall be quit"; the loss of his beast is his sufficient penalty.

But if its evil temper has been previously observed, and he has been warned, then his recklessness amounts to blood-guiltiness, and he must die, or else pay whatever ransom is laid upon him. This last clause recognises the distinction between his guilt and that of a deliberate manslayer, for whose crime the law distinctly prohibited a composition (Num. xxxv. 31).

And it is expressly provided, according to the honourable position of woman in the Hebrew state, that the penalty for a daughter's life shall be the same as for that of a son.

As a slave was exposed to especial risk, and his position was an ignoble one, a fixed composition was appointed, and the amount was memorable. The ransom of a common slave, killed by the horns of the wild oxen, was thirty pieces of silver, the goodly price that Messiah was prized at of them (Zech. xi. 13).

Part III.—Rights of Property.

xxi. 33—xxii. 15.

The vital and quic ening principle in this section is the stress it lays upon man's responsibility for negligence, and the indirect consequences of his deed. All sin is selfish, and all selfishness ignores the right of others. Am I my brother's keeper? Let him

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LESSER LAW (continued).

Part IV.

xxii. 16—xxiii. 19.

THE Fourth section of this law within the law consists of enactments, curiously disconnected, many of them without a penalty, varying greatly in importance, but all of a moral nature, and connected with the well-being of the state. It is hard to conceive how the systematic revision of which we hear so much could have left them in the condition in which they stand.

It is enacted that a seducer must marry the woman he has betrayed, and if her father refuse to give her to him, then he must pay the same dower as a bridegroom would have done (xxii. 16, 17). And presently the sentence of death is launched against a blacker sensual crime (19). But between the two is interposed the celebrated mandate which doomed the sorceress to death, remarkable as the first mention of witchcraft in Scripture, and the only passage in all the Bible where the word is in the feminine form—a witch, or sorceress; remarkable also for a far graver reason, which makes it necessary to linger over the subject at some length.

SORCERY.

"Thou shalt not suffer a sorceress to live."—xxii. 18.

The world knows only too well what sad and shameful inferences have been drawn from these words. Unspeakable terrors, estrangement of natural sympathy, tortures and cruel deaths, have been inflicted on many thousands of the most forlorn creatures upon earth (creatures who were sustained in their sufferings by no high ardour of conviction or fanaticism, not being martyrs but simply victims), because it was held that Moses, in declaring that witches should not live, affirmed the reality of witchcraft. No sooner did the argument cease to be dangerous to old women than it became formidable to religion; for now it was urged that, since Moses was in error about the reality of witchcraft, his legislation could not have been inspired.

What are we to say to this?

In the first place it must be observed that the existence of a sorcerer is one thing, and the reality of his powers is quite another. What was most sad and shameful in the mediæval frenzy was the burning to ashes of multitudes who made no pretensions to traffic with the invisible world, who frequently held fast their innocence while enduring the agonies of torture, who were only aged and ugly and alone. Upon any theory, the prohibition of sorcery by the Pentateuch was no more answerable for these iniquities than its other prohibitions for the lynch law of the backwoods.

On the other hand, there were real professors of the black art: men did pretend to hold intercourse with

spirits, and extorted great sums from their dupes in return for bringing them also into communion with superhuman beings. These it is reasonable to call sorcerers, whether we accept their professions or not, just as we speak of thought-readers and of mediums without being understood to commit ourselves to the pretensions of either one or other. In point of fact, the existence, in this nineteenth century after Christ, of sorcerers calling themselves mediums, is much more surprising than the existence of other sorcerers in the time of Moses or of Saul; and it bears startling witness to the depth in human nature of that craving for traffic with invisible powers which the law prohibited so sternly, but the roots of which neither religion nor education nor scepticism has been able wholly to pluck up.

. Again, from the point of view which Moses occupied, it is plain that such professors should be punished. They are virtually punished still, whenever they obtain money under pretence of granting interviews with the departed. If we now rely chiefly upon educated public opinion to stamp out such impositions, that is because we have decided that a struggle between truth and falsehood upon equal terms will be advantageous to the former. It is a subdivision of the debate between intolerance and free thought. Our theory works well, but not universally well, even under modern conditions and in Christian lands. And assuredly Moses could not proclaim freedom of opinion, among uneducated slaves, amid the pressure of splendid and of seductive idolatries, and before the Holy Ghost was given. To complain of Moses for proscribing false religions would be to denounce the use of glass for seedlings because the full-grown plant flourishes in the open air.

Now, it would have been preposterous to proscribe

false religions and yet to tolerate the sorcerer and the sorceress. For these were the active practitioners of another worship than that of God. They might not profess idolatry; but they offered help and guidance from sources which Jehovah frowned upon, rival sources of defence or knowledge.

The holy people was meant to grow up under the most elevating of all influences, reliance upon a protecting God, Who had bidden His children to subdue the world as well as to replenish it, and of Whom one of their own poets sang that He had put all things under the feet of man. Their true heritage was not bounded by the strip of land which Joshua and his followers slowly conquered; to them belonged all the resources of nature which science, ever since, has wrested from the Philistine hands of barbarism and ignorance. And this nobler conquest depended upon the depth and sincerity of man's feeling that the world is well-ordered and stable and the heritage of man, not a chaos of various and capricious powers, where Pallas inspires Diomed to hunt Venus bleeding off the field, or where the incantations of Canidia may disturb the orderly movements of the skies. Who could hope to discover by inductive science the secrets of such a world as this?

The devices of magic cut the links between cause and effect, between studious labour and the fruits which sorcery bade men to steal rather than to cultivate. What gambling was to commerce, that was witchcraft to philosophy, and the mischief no more depended on the validity of its methods than upon the soundness of the last device for breaking the bank at Monte Carlo.

If one could actually extort their secrets from the

dead, or win for luxury and sloth a longer life than is bestowed upon temperance and labour, he would succeed in his revolt against the God of nature. But the revolt was the endeavour; and the sorcerer, however falsely, professed to have succeeded; and preached the same revolt to others. In religion he was therefore an apostate, and in the theocracy a traitor against the King, one whose life was forfeited if it was prudent to exact the penalty.

And when we consider the fascination wielded by such pretensions, even in ages when the stability of nature is an axiom, the dread which false religions all around and their terrible rituals must have inspired, the superstitious tendencies of the people and their readiness to be misled, we shall see ample reasons for treading out the first sparks of so dangerous a fire.

Beyond this it is vain to pretend that the law of Moses goes. It was right in declaring the sorcerer and the sorceress to be real and dangerous phenomena. It never declared their pretensions to be valid though illegitimate. And in one noteworthy passage it proclaims that a real sign or a wonder could only proceed from God, and when it accompanied false teaching was still a sign, though an ominous one, implying that the Lord would prove them (Deut. xiii. 1-3). This does not look very like an admission of the existence of rival powers, inferior though they might be, who could interfere with the order of His world.

Sorcery in all its forms will die when men realise indeed that the world is His, that there is no short or crooked way to the prizes which He offers to wisdom and to labour, that these rewards are infinitely richer and more splendid than the wildest dreams of magic, and that it is literally true that all power, in earth as

well as heaven, is committed into the Hands which were pierced for us. In such a conception of the universe, incantations give place to prayers, and prayer does not seek to disturb, but to carry forward and to consummate, the orderly rule of Love.

The denunciation of witchcraft is quite naturally followed, as we now perceive, by the reiteration of the command that no sacrifice may be offered to any god except Jehovah (20). Strange and hateful offerings were an integral part of witchcraft, long before the hags of Macbeth brewed their charm, or the child in Horace famished to yield a spell.

THE STRANGER.

xxii. 21, xxiii. 9.

Immediately after this, a ray of sunlight falls upon the sombre page.

We read an exhortation rather than a statute, which is repeated almost literally in the next chapter, and in both is supported by a beautiful and touching reason. "A stranger shalt thou not wrong, neither shall ye oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." "A stranger shall ye not oppress, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (xxii. 21, xxiii. 9).

The "stranger" of these verses is probably the settler among them, as distinguished from the traveller passing through the land. His want of friends and ignorance of their social order would place him at a disadvantage, of which they are forbidden to avail themselves, either by legal process (for the first passage is connected with jurisprudence), or in the affairs of common life. But the spirit of the commandment

could not fail to influence their treatment of all foreigners; and simple and commonplace though it appear to us, it would have startled many of the wisest and greatest peoples of antiquity, and would have fallen as strangely upon the ears of the Greeks of Pericles, as of the modern Bedouin, with whom Israel had kinship. A foreigner, as such, was a foe: to wrong him was a paradox, because he had no rights: kinship, or else alliance or treaty was required to entitle the weaker to any better treatment than it suited the stronger to allow.

Yet we find a precept reiterated in this Jewish code which involves, in its inevitable though slow development, the abolition of negro slavery, the respect by powerful and civilised nations of the rights of indigenous tribes, the most boundless advance of philanthropy, through the most generous recognition of the fraternity of man.

However sternly the sword of Joshua might fall, it struck not at the foreigner, as such, but at those tribes, guilty and therefore accursed of God, the cup of whose iniquity was full. And yet there was enough of carnage to prove that so gracious a commandment as this could not have risen spontaneously in the heart of early Judaism. Does it seem to be made more natural, by any proposed shifting of the date?

The reason of the precept is beautifully human. It rests upon no abstract basis of common rights, nor prudential consideration of mutual advantage.

In our time it is sometimes proposed to build all morality upon such foundations; and strange consequences have already been deduced in cases where the proposed sanction has not seemed to apply. But, in fact, no advance in virtue has ever been traced to

self-interest, although, after the advance took place, self-interest has always found its account in it. A progressive community is made of good men, and the motive to which Moses appeals is compassion fed by memory: "For ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (xxii. 21); "For ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (xxiii. 9).

The point is not that they may again be carried into captivity: it is that they have felt its bitterness, and ought to recoil from inflicting what they writhed under.

Now, this appeal is a master-stroke of wisdom. Much cruelty, and almost all the cruelty of the young, springs from ignorance, and that slowness of the imagination which cannot realise that the pains of others are like our own. Feeling them to be so, the charities of the poor toward one another frequently rise almost to sublimity. And thus, when suffering does not ulcerate the heart and make it savage, it is the most softening of all influences. In one of the most threadbare lines in the classics, the queen of Carthage boasts that

> "I, not ignorant of woe,
> To pity the distressful know."

And the boldest assertion in Scripture of the natural development of our Saviour's human powers, is that which declares that "In that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb. ii. 18).

To this principle, then, Moses appeals, and by the appeal he educates the heart. He bids the people reflect on their own cruel hardships, on the hateful character of their tyrants, on their own greater hatefulness if they follow the vile example, after such bitter experience of its character. He does not yet

rise to the grand level of the New Testament morality, Do all to thy neighbour which it is not servile and dependent to will that he should do for thee. But he attains to the level of that precept of Confucius and Zoroaster which has been so unworthily compared with it: Do not unto thy neighbour what thou wouldest not that he should do to thee—a precept which mere indifference obeys. Nay, he excels it; for the mental and spiritual attitude of one who respects his helpless neighbour because he so much resembles himself, will surely not be content without relieving the griefs that have so closely touched him. Thus again the legislation of Moses looks beyond itself.

Now, if the Jew should be merciful because he had himself known calamity, what implicit confidence may we repose upon the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?

In the same spirit they are warned against afflicting the widow or the orphan. And the threat which is added joins hand with the exhortation which preceded. They should not oppress the stranger, because they had been strangers and oppressed. Now the argument advances. The same God Who then heard their cry will hear the cry of the forlorn, and avenge them, according to the judicial fate which He had just announced, in kind, by bringing their own wives to widowhood and their children to orphanage (xxii. 22-4).

To their brethren they should not lend money upon usury; but loans are no more recommended than afterwards by Solomon: the words are "if thou lend" (ver. 25). And if the raiment of the borrower were taken for a pledge, it must be returned for him to use at night, or else God will hear his cry, because, it is added

very significantly and briefly, "I am gracious" (ver. 27). It is the most exalting of all motives: Be merciful, for I am merciful: ye shall be the children of your Father.

Again is to be observed the influence reaching beyond the prescription—the motive which cannot be felt without many other and larger consequences than the restoration of pledges at sunset.

How comes this precept to be followed by the words, "Thou shalt not curse God nor blaspheme a ruler" (ver. 28)? and is not this again somewhat strangely followed by the order not to delay to offer the firstfruits of the soil, to consecrate the firstborn son, and to devote the firstborn of cattle at the same age when a son ought to be circumcised? (vers. 29, 30).

If any link can be discovered, it is in the sense of communion with God, suggested by the recent appeal to His character as a motive that should weigh with man. Therefore they must not blaspheme Him, either directly or through His agents, nor tardily yield Him what He claims. Therefore it is added, "Ye shall be holy men unto Me," and from the sense of dignity which religion thus inspires, a homely corollary is deduced—"Ye shall not eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field" (ver. 31). The bondmen of Egypt must learn a high-minded self-respect.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LESSER LAW (continued).

xxiii. 1-19.

THE twenty-third chapter begins with a series of commands bearing upon the course of justice; but among these there is interjected very curiously a command to bring back the stray ox or ass of an enemy, and to help under a burden the over-weighted ass of him that hateth thee, even "if thou wouldest forbear to help him." It is just possible that the lawgiver, urging justice in the bearing of testimony, interrupts himself to speak of a very different manner in which the action may be warped by prejudice, but in which (unlike the other) it is lawful to show not only impartiality but kindness. The help of the cattle of one's enemy shows that in the bearing of testimony we should not merely abstain from downright wrong. And it is a fine example of the spirit of the New Testament, in the Old.

"Thou shalt not take up a false report" (ver. 1) is a precept which reaches far. How many heedless whispers, conjectures lightly spoken because they were amusing, yet influencing the course of lives, and inferences uncharitably drawn, would have been still-born if this had been remembered!

But when the scandal is already abroad, the tempta-

tion to aid its progress is still greater. Therefore it is added, "Put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness." Whatever be the menace or the bribe, however the course of opinion seem to be decided, and the assent of an individual to be harmless because the result is sure, or blameless because the responsibility lies elsewhere, still each man is a unit, not an "item," and must act for himself, as hereafter he must give account. Hence it results inevitably that "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil, neither shalt thou speak in a cause to turn aside after a multitude to wrest judgment" (ver. 2). The blind impulses of a multitude are often as misleading as the solicitations of the bad, and to aspiring temperaments much more seductive. There is indeed a strange magnetism in the voice of the public. Every orator knows that a great assembly acts upon the speaker as really as he acts upon it: its emotions are like a rush of waters to sweep him away, beyond his intentions or his ordinary powers. Yet he is the strongest individual there; no other has at all the same opportunity for self-assertion, and therefore its power over others must be more complete than over him.

This is one reason for the institution of public worship. Men neglect the house of God because they can pray as well at home, and encourage wanton subdivisions of the Church because they think there is no very palpable difference between competing denominations, or even because competition may be as useful in religion as in trade, as if our competition with the world and the devil for souls would not sufficiently animate us, without competing with one another. But in acting thus they weaken the effect for good of one of the mightiest influences which work

evil among us, the influence of association. Men are always persuading themselves that they need not be better than their neighbours, nor ashamed of doing what every one does. And yet no voice joins in a cry without deepening it: every one who rushes with a crowd makes its impulse more difficult to stem; his individuality is not lost by its partnership with a thousand more; and he is accountable for what he contributes to the result. He has parted with his self-control, but not with the inner forces which he ought to have controlled.

Against this dangerous influence of the world, Christ has set the contagion of godliness within His Church, and every avoidable subdivision enfeebles this salutary counter-influence.

Moses warns us, therefore, of the danger of being drawn away by a multitude to do evil; but he is thinking especially of the peril of being tempted to "speak" amiss. Who does not know it? From the statesman who outruns his convictions rather than break with his party, and who cannot, amid deafening cheers, any longer hear his conscience speak, down to the humblest who fails to confess Christ before hostile men, and therefore by-and-by denies Him, there is not one whose speech and silence have never been in danger of being set to the sympathies of his own little public like a song to music.

That Moses was really thinking of this tendency to court popularity, is plain from the next clause—"Neither shalt thou favour a poor man in his cause" (ver. 3).

It is an admirable caution. Men there are who would scorn the opposite injustice, and from whom no rich man could buy a wrongful decision with gold

or favour, but who are habitually unjust, because they load the other scale. The beam ought to hang straight. When justice is concerned, the poor man's friend is almost as contemptible as his foe, and he has taken a bribe, if not in the mean enjoyment of democratic popularity, yet in his own pride—the fancy that he has done a magnanimous act, the attitude in which he poses.

As in law so in literature. There once was a tendency to describe magnanimous persons of quality, and repulsive clodhoppers and villagers. Times have changed, and now we think it much more ingenious and high-toned to be quite as partial and disingenuous, reversing the cases. Neither is true, and therefore neither is artistic. No class in society is deficient in noble qualities, or in base ones. Nor is the man of letters at all more independent, who flatters the democracy in a democratic age, than he who flattered the aristocracy when they had all the prizes to bestow.

Other precepts forbid bribery, command that the soil shall rest in the seventh year, when its spontaneous produce shall be for the poor, and further recognise and consecrate relaxation, by instituting (or more probably adopting into the code) the three feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The section closes with the words "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (ver. 19). Upon this clause much ingenuity has been expended. It makes occult reference to some superstitious rite. It is the name for some unduly stimulating compound. But when we remember that, just before, the sabbatical fruit which the poor left ungleaned was expressly reserved for the beasts of the field, that men were bidden to help the overladen ass of their enemies, and that care

is taken elsewhere that the ox should not be muzzled when treading out grain, that the birdnester should not take the dam with the young, and that neither cow nor ewe should be slain on the same day with its young (Deut. xxv. 4, xxii. 6; Lev. xxii. 28), the simplest meaning seems also the most probable. Men, who have been taught respect for their fellow-men, are also to learn a fine sensibility even in respect to the inferior animals. Throughout all this code there is an exquisite tendency to form a considerate, humane, delicate and high-minded nation.

It remained, to stamp upon the human conscience a deep sense of responsibility.

Part V.—Its Sanctions.

xxiii. 20-33.

This summary of Judaism being now complete, the people have to learn what mighty issues are at stake upon their obedience. And the transition is very striking from the simplest duty to the loftiest privilege: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk. Behold, I send an Angel before thee. . . . Beware of him: for My Name is in him" (19-21).

We have now to ask how much this mysterious phrase involves; who was the Angel of whom it speaks?

The question is not, How much did Israel at that moment comprehend? For we are distinctly told that prophets were conscious of speaking more than they understood, and searched diligently but in vain what the spirit that was in them did signify (1 Peter i. 11).

It would, in fact, be absurd to seek the New Testa-

ment doctrine of the Logos full-blown in the Pentateuch. But it is mere prejudice, unphilosophical and presumptuous, to shut one's eyes against any evidence which may be forthcoming that the earliest books of Scripture were tending towards the last conclusions of theology; that the slender overture to the Divine oratorio indicates already the same theme which thunders from all the chorus at the close.

It is scarcely necessary to refute the position that a mere "messenger" is intended, because angels have not yet "appeared as personal agents separate from God." Kalisch himself has amply refuted his own theory. For, he says, "we are compelled . . . to refer it to Moses and his successor Joshua" (*in loco*). So then He Who will not forgive their transgressions is he who prayed that if God would not pardon them, his own name might be blotted from the book of life. He, to whom afterwards God said "I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee" (xxxiii. 19), is the same of Whom God said "My name is in Him." This position needs no examination; but the perplexities of those who reject the deeper interpretation is a strong confirmation of its soundness. We have still to choose between the promise of a created angel, and some manifestation and interposition of God, distinguished from Jehovah and yet one with Him. This latter view is an evident preparation for clearer knowledge yet to come. It is enough to stamp the dispensation which puts it forth as but provisional, and therefore bears witness to that other dispensation which has the key to it. And it is exactly what a Christian would expect to find somewhere in this summary of the law.

What, then, do we read elsewhere about the Angel

of Jehovah? What do we find, especially, in these early books?

A difficulty has to be met at the very outset. The issue would be decided offhand, if it could be shown that the Angel of this verse is the same who is offered, as a poor substitute for their Divine protector, in the thirty-third chapter. But no contrast can be clearer than between the encouraging promise before us, and the sharp menace which then plunged Israel into mourning. Here is an Angel who must not be provoked, who will not pardon you, because "My Name is in Him." There is an angel who will be sent because God will not go up, . . . lest He consume them (vers. 2, 3). He is not the Angel of God's presence, but of His absence. When the intercession of Moses won from God a reversal of the sentence, He then said "My Presence (My Face) shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest,"* but Moses answers, not yet reassured, "If Thy Presence (Thy Face) go not up with us, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known that I have found grace in Thy sight? . . . Is it not that Thou goest with us? And the Lord said, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken" (14-17).

Moreover, Isaiah, speaking of this time, says that "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence (His Face) saved them" (Isa. lxiii. 9).

Thus we find that some angel is to be sent because God will not go up: that thereupon the nation mourns,

* Even if the rendering were accepted, "Must My Presence (My Face) go with thee?" (Can I not be trusted without a direct Presence?) the argument would not be affected, because Moses presses for the favour and obtains it.

although in this twenty-third chapter they had received as a gladdening promise, the assurance of an Angel escort in Whom is the name of God; that in response to prayer God promises that His Face shall accompany them, so that it may be known that He Himself goes with them; and finally that His Face in Exodus is the Angel of His Face in Isaiah. The prophet at least had no doubt whether the gracious promise in the twenty-third chapter answered, in the thirty-third chapter, to the third verse or the fourteenth—to the menace, or to the restored favour.

This difficulty being now converted into an evidence, we turn back to examine other passages.

When the Angel of the Lord spoke to Hagar, "she called the name of Jehovah that spake unto her El Roi" (Gen. xvi. 11, 13). When God tempted Abraham, "the Angel of Jehovah called unto him out of heaven, and said, . . . I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son . . . from Me" (Gen. xxii. 11, 12). When a man wrestled with Jacob, he thereupon claimed to have seen God face to face, and called the place Peniel, the Face (Presence) of God (Gen. xxxii. 4, 30). But Hosea tells us that "He had power with God: yea, he had power over the Angel, . . . and there He spake with us, even Jehovah, the God of hosts" (Hos. xii. 3, 5). Even earlier, in his exile, the Angel of the Lord had appeared unto him and said, "I am the God of Bethel . . . where thou vowedst a vow unto Me." But the vow was distinctly made to God Himself: "I will surely give the tenth to Thee" (xxxi. 11, 13; xxviii. 20, 22). Is it any wonder that when this patriarch blessed Joseph, he said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which hath fed me all my life long unto this

day, the Angel which hath redeemed me from all evil, (may He) bless the lads" (xlviii. 15, 16)?

In Exodus iii. 2 the Angel of the Lord appeared out of the bush. But presently He changes into Jehovah Himself, and announces Himself to be Jehovah the God of their fathers (iii. 2, 4, 15). In Exodus xiii. 21 Jehovah went before Israel, but the next chapter tells how "the Angel of the Lord which went before Israel removed and went behind" (xiv. 19); while Numbers (xx. 16) says expressly that "He sent an Angel and brought us out of Egypt."

By the comparison of these and many later passages (which is nothing but the scientific process of induction, leaning not on the weight of any single verse, but on the drift and tendency of all the phenomena) we learn that God was already revealing Himself through a Medium, a distinct personality whom He could send, yet not so distinct but that His name was in Him, and He Himself was the Author of what He did.

If Israel obeyed Him, He would bring them into the promised land (ver. 23); and if there they continued unseduced by false worships, He would bless their provisions, their bodily frame, their children; He would bring terror and a hornet against their foes; He would clear the land before them as fast as their population could enjoy it; He would extend their boundaries yet farther, from the Red Sea, where Solomon held Ezion Geber (1 Kings ix. 26), to the Mediterranean, and from the desert where they stood to the Euphrates, where Solomon actually possessed Palmyra and Thiphsah (2 Chron. viii. 4; 1 Kings iv. 24).

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE COVENANT RATIFIED. THE VISION OF GOD.

xxiv.

THE opening words of this chapter ("Come up unto the Lord") imply, without explicitly asserting, that Moses was first sent down to convey to Israel the laws which had just been enacted.

This code they unanimously accepted, and he wrote it down. It is a memorable statement, recording the origin of the first portion of Holy Scripture that ever existed as such, whatever earlier writings may now or afterwards have been incorporated in the Pentateuch. He then built an altar for God, and twelve pillars for the tribes, and sacrificed burnt-offerings and peace-offerings unto the Lord. Sin-offerings, it will be observed, were not yet instituted; and neither was the priesthood, so that young men slew the offerings. Half of the blood was poured upon the altar, because God had perfected His share in the covenant. The remainder was not used until the law had been read aloud, and the people had answered with one voice, "All that the Lord hath commanded will we do, and will be obedient." Thereupon they too were sprinkled with the blood, and the solemn words were spoken, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." The

people were now finally bound: no later covenant of the same kind will be found in the Old Testament.

And now the principle began to work which was afterwards embodied in the priesthood. That principle, stated broadly, was exclusion from the presence of God, relieved and made hopeful by the admission of representatives. The people were still forbidden to approach, under pain of death. But Moses and Aaron were no longer the only ones to cross the appointed boundaries. With them came the two sons of Aaron, (afterwards, despite their privilege, to meet a dreadful doom,) and also seventy representatives of all the newly covenanted people. Joshua, too, as the servant of Moses, was free to come, although unspecified in the summons (vers. 1, 13).

"They saw the God of Israel," and under His feet the blueness of the sky like intense sapphire. And they were secure: they beheld God, and ate and drank.

But in privilege itself there are degrees: Moses was called up still higher, and left Aaron and Hur to govern the people while he communed with his God. For six days the nation saw the flanks of the mountain swathed in cloud, and its summit crowned with the glory of Jehovah like devouring fire. Then Moses entered the cloud, and during forty days they knew not what had become of him. Was it time lost? Say rather that all time is wasted except what is spent in communion, direct or indirect, with the Eternal.

The narrative is at once simple and sublime. We are sometimes told that other religions besides our own rely for sanction upon their supernatural origin. "Zarathustra, Sâkya-Mooni and Mahomed pass among their followers for envoys of the Godhead; and

in the estimation of the Brahmin the Vedas and the laws of Manou are holy, divine books" (Kuenen, *Religion of Israel*, i. 6). This is true. But there is a wide difference between nations which assert that God privately appeared to their teachers, and a nation which asserts that God appeared to the public. It is not upon the word of Moses that Israel is said to have believed; and even those who reject the narrative are not entitled to confound it with narratives utterly dissimilar. There is not to be found anywhere a parallel for this majestic story.

But what are we to think of the assertion that God was seen to stand upon a burning mountain?

He it is Whom no man hath seen or can see, and in His presence the seraphim veil their faces.

It will not suffice to answer that Moses "endured as seeing Him that is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27), for the paraphrase is many centuries later, and hostile critics will rule it out of court as an after-thought. At least, however, it proves that the problem was faced long ago, and tells us what solution satisfied the early Church.

With this clue before us, we ask what notion did the narrative really convey to its ancient readers? If our defence is to be thoroughly satisfactory, it must show an escape from heretical and carnal notions of deity, not only for ourselves, but also for careful readers from the very first.

Now it is certain that no such reader could for one moment think of a manifestation thorough, exhaustive, such as the eye receives of colour and of form. Because the effect produced is not satisfaction, but desire. Each new vision deepens the sense of the unseen. Thus we read first that Moses and Aaron,

Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders, saw God, from which revelation the people felt and knew themselves to be excluded. And yet the multitude also had a vision according to its power to see; and indeed it was more satisfying to them than was the most profound insight enjoyed by Moses. To see God is to sail to the horizon: when you arrive, the horizon is as far in front as ever; but you have gained a new consciousness of infinitude. "The appearance of the glory of the Lord was seen like devouring fire in the eyes of the children of Israel" (ver. 17). But Moses was aware of a glory far greater and more spiritual than any material splendour. When theophanies had done their utmost, his longing was still unslaked, and he cried out, "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory" (xxxiii. 18). To his consciousness that glory was still veiled, which the multitude sufficiently beheld in the flaming mountain. And the answer which he received ought to put the question at rest for ever, since, along with the promise "All My goodness shall pass before thee," came the assertion "Thou shalt not see My face, for no man shall see Me and live."

So, then, it is not our modern theology, but this noble book of Exodus itself, which tells us that Moses did not and could not adequately see God, however great and sacred the vision which he beheld. From this book we learn that, side by side with the most intimate communion and the clearest possible unveiling of God, grew up the profound consciousness that only some attributes and not the essence of deity had been displayed.

It is very instructive also to observe the steps by which Moses is led upward. From the burning bush

to the fiery cloud, and thence to the blazing mountain, there was an ever-deepening lesson of majesty and awe. But in answer to the prayer that he might really see the very glory of his Lord, his mind is led away upon entirely another pathway: it is "All My goodness" which is now to "pass before" him, and the proclamation is of "a God full of compassion and gracious," yet retaining His moral firmness, so that He "will by no means clear the guilty."

What can cloud and fire avail, toward the manifesting of a God Whose essence is His love? It is from the Old Testament narrative that the New Testament inferred that Moses endured as seeing indeed, yet as seeing Him Who is inevitably and for ever invisible to eyes of flesh: he learned most, not when he beheld some form of awe, standing on a paved work of sapphire stone and as it were the very heaven for clearness, but when hidden in a cleft of the rock and covered by the hand of God while He passed by.

On one hand the people saw the glory of God: on the other hand it was the best lesson taught by a far closer access, still to pray and yearn to see that glory. The seventy beheld the God of Israel: for their leader was reserved the more exalting knowledge, that beyond all vision is the mystic overshadowing of the Divine, and a voice which says "No man shall see Me and live." The difference in heart is well typified in this difference in their conduct, that they saw God and ate and drank, but he, for forty days, ate not. Satisfaction and assurance are a poor ideal compared with rapt aspiration and desire.

Thus we see that no conflict exists between this declaration and our belief in the spirituality of God.

We have still to ask what is the real force of the

assertion that God was in some lesser sense seen of Israel, and again, more especially, of its leaders.

What do we mean even by saying that we see each other?—that, observing keenly, we see upon one face cunning, upon another sorrow, upon a third the peace of God? Are not these emotions immaterial and invisible as the essence of God Himself? Nay, so invisible is the reality within each bosom, that some day all that eye hath seen shall fall away from us, and yet the true man shall remain intact.

Man has never seen more than a hint, an outcome, a partial self-revelation or self-betrayal of his fellow-man.

> "Yes, in the sea of life in-isled,
> With echoing straits between us thrown,
> Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
> We mortal millions live *alone*.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> God bade betwixt 'our' shores to be
> The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea."

And yet, incredible as the paradox would seem, if it were not too common to be strange, the play of muscles and rush of blood, visible through the skin, do reveal the most spiritual and immaterial changes. Even so the heavens declare that very glory of God which baffled the undimmed eyes of Moses. So it was, also, that when rended rocks and burning skies revealed a more immanent action of Him Who moves through all nature always, when convulsions hitherto undreamed of by those dwellers in Egyptian plains overwhelmed them with a new sense of their own smallness and a supreme Presence, God was manifested there.

Not unlike this is the explanation of St. Augustine.

"We need not be surprised that God, invisible as He is, appeared visibly to the patriarchs. For, as the sound which communicates the thought conceived in the silence of the mind is not the thought itself, so the form by which God, invisible in His own nature, became visible, was not God Himself. Nevertheless it was He Himself Who was seen under that form, as the thought itself is heard in the sound of the voice; and the patriarchs recognised that, although the bodily form was not God, they saw the invisible God. For, though Moses was conversing with God, yet he said, "If I have found grace in Thy sight, show me Thyself" (*De Civ. Dei*, x. 13). And again: "He knew that he saw corporeally, but he sought the true vision of God spiritually" (*De Trin.*, ii. 27).

It has still to be added that His manifestation is exactly suited to the stage now reached in the education of Israel. Their fathers had already "seen God" in the likeness of man: Abraham had entertained Him; Jacob had wrestled with Him. And so Joshua before Ai, and Manoah by the rock at Zorah, and Ezekiel by the river Chebar, should see the likeness of a man. We who believe the doctrine of a real Incarnation can well perceive that in these passing and mysterious glimpses God was not only revealing Himself in the way which would best prepare humanity for His future coming in actual manhood, but also in the way by which, meanwhile, the truest and deepest light could be thrown upon His nature, a nature which could hereafter perfectly manifest itself in flesh. Why, then, do not the records of the Exodus hint at a human likeness? Why did they "behold no similitude"? Clearly because the masses of Israel were utterly unprepared to receive rightly such a vision. To them

the likeness of man would have meant no more than the likeness of a flying eagle or a calf. Idolatry would have followed, but no sense of sympathy, no consciousness of the grandeur and responsibility of being made in the likeness of God. Anthropomorphism is a heresy, although the Incarnation is the crowning doctrine of the faith.

But it is hard to see why the human likeness of God should exist in Genesis and Joshua, but not in the history of the Exodus, if that story be a post-Exilian forgery.

This is not all. The revelations of God in the desert were connected with threats and prohibitions: the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. And with the different tone of the message a different aspect of the speaker was to be expected. From the blazing crags of Sinai, fenced around, the voice of a trumpet waxing louder and louder, said "Thou shalt not!" On the green hill by the Galilæan lake Jesus sat down, and His disciples came unto Him, and He opened His mouth and said "Blessed."

Now, the conscience of every sinner knows that the God of the commandments is dreadful. It is of Him, not of hell, that Isaiah said "The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath surprised the godless ones. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isa. xxxiii. 14).

For him who rejects the light yoke of the Lord of Love, the fires of Sinai are still the truest revelation of deity; and we must not deny Sinai because we know Bethlehem. We must choose between the two.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SHRINE AND ITS FURNITURE.

xxv. 1-40.

THE first direction given to Moses on the mountain is to prepare for the making of a tabernacle wherein God may dwell with man. For this he must invite offerings of various kinds, metals and gems, skins and fabrics, oil and spices; and the humblest man whose heart is willing may contribute toward an abode for Him Whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

Strange indeed is the contrast between the mountain burning up to heaven, and the lowly structure of the wood of the desert, which was now to be erected by subscription.

And yet the change marks not a lower conception of deity, but an advance, just as the quiet and serene communion of a saint with God is loftier than the most agitating experience of the convert.

This is the first announcement of a fixed abiding presence of God in the midst of men, and it is therefore the precursor of much. St. John certainly alluded to this earliest dwelling of God on earth when he wrote, "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us" (John i. 14). A little later it was said, "Ye also are builded together for an habitation of God" (Eph. ii. 22); and again the very words used at first of the

tabernacle are applied to faithful souls: "We are a temple of the living God, as God said, I will dwell in them and walk in them" (2 Cor. vi. 16; Lev. xxvi. 11). For God dwelt on earth in the Messiah hidden by the veil, that is to say His flesh (Heb. x. 20), and also in the hearts of all the faithful. And a yet fuller communion is to come, of which the tabernacle in the wilderness was a type, even the descent of the Holy City, when the true tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He shall tabernacle with them (Rev. xxi. 3).

It may seem strange that after the commandment "Let them make Me a sanctuary" the whole chapter is devoted to instructions, not for the tabernacle but for its furniture. But indeed the four articles enumerated in this chapter present a wonderfully graphic picture of the nature and terms of the intercourse of God with man. On one side is His revelation of righteousness, but righteousness propitiated and become gracious, and this is symbolised by the ark of the testimony and the mercy-seat. On the other side the consecration both of secular and sacred life is typified by the table with bread and wine, and by the golden candlestick. Except thus, no tabernacle could have been the dwelling of the Lord, nor ever shall be.

And this is the true reason why the altar of incense is not even mentioned until a later chapter (xxx.). We do homage to God because He is present: it is rather the consequence than the condition of His abode with us.

The first step towards the preparation of a shrine for God on earth is the enshrining of His will: Moses should therefore make first of all an ark, wherein to treasure up "the testimony which I shall give thee," the two tables of the law (xxv. 16). In it were also

the pot of manna and Aaron's rod which budded (Heb. ix. 4), and beside it was laid the whole book of the law, for a testimony, alas! against them (Deut. xxxi. 26).

Thus the ark was to treasure up the expression of the will of God, and the relics which told by what mercies and deliverances He claimed obedience. It was a precious thing, but not the most precious, as we shall presently learn; and therefore it was not made of pure gold, but overlaid with it. That it might be reverently carried, four rings were cast and fastened to it at the lower corners, and in these four staves, also overlaid with gold, were permanently inserted.

The next article mentioned is the most important of all.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that the mercy-seat was a mere lid, an ordinary portion of the ark itself. It was made of a different and more costly material, of pure gold, with which the ark was only overlaid. There is separate mention that Bezaleel "made the ark, . . . and he made the mercy-seat" (xxxvii. 1, 6), and the special presence of God in the Most Holy Place is connected much more intimately with the mercy-seat than with the remainder of the structure. Thus He promises to "appear in the cloud above the mercy-seat" (Lev. xvi. 2). And when it is written that "Moses heard the Voice speaking unto him from above the mercy-seat which is upon the ark of the testimony" (Num. vii. 89), it would have been more natural to say directly "from above the ark" unless some stress were to be laid upon the interposing slab of gold. In reality no distinction could be sharper than between the ark and its cover, from whence to hear the voice of God. And so thoroughly did all

the symbolism of the Most Holy Place gather around this supreme object, that in one place it is actually called "the house of the mercy-seat" (1 Chron. xxviii. 11).

Let us, then, put ourselves into the place of an ancient worshipper. Excluded though he is from the Holy Place, and conscious that even the priests are shut out from the inner shrine, yet the high priest who enters is his brother: he goes on his behalf: the barrier is a curtain, not a wall.

But while the Israelite mused upon what was beyond, the ark, as we have seen, suggests the depth of his obligation; for there is the rod of his deliverance and the bread from heaven which fed him; and there also are the commandments which he ought to have kept. And his conscience tells him of ingratitude and a broken covenant; by the law is the knowledge of sin.

It is therefore a sinister and menacing thought that immediately above this ark of the violated covenant burns the visible manifestation of God, his injured Benefactor.

And hence arises the golden value of that which interposes, beneath which the accusing law is buried, by means of which God "hides His face from our sins."

The worshipper knows this cover to be provided by a separate ordinance of God, after the ark and its contents had been arranged for, and finds in it a vivid concrete representation of the idea "Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back" (Isa. xxxviii. 17). That this was its true intention becomes more evident when we ascertain exactly the meaning of the term which we have, not too precisely, rendered "mercy-seat."

The word "seat" has no part in the original; and we are not to think of God as reposing on it, but as

revealing Himself above. The erroneous notion has probably transferred itself to the type from the heavenly antitype, which is "the throne of grace," but it has no countenance either in the Greek or the Hebrew name of the Mosaic institution. Nor is the notion expressed that of gratuitous and unbought "mercy." When Jehovah showeth mercy unto thousands, the word is different. It is true that the root means "to cover," and is once employed in Scripture in that sense (Gen. vi. 14); but its ethical use is generally connected with sacrifice; and when we read of a "sin-offering for *atonement*," of the half-shekel being an "*atonement*-money," and of "the day of *atonement*," the word is a simple and very similar development from the same root with this which we render *mercy-seat* (Exod. xxx. 10, 16; Lev. xxiii. 27, etc.).

The Greek word is found twice in the New Testament: once when the cherubim of glory overshadow the *mercy-seat*, and again when God hath set forth Christ to be a *propitiation* (Heb. ix. 5; Rom. iii. 25). The mercy-seat is therefore to be thought of in connection with sin, but sin expiated and thus covered and put away.

We know mysteries which the Israelite could not guess of the means by which this was brought to pass. But as he watched the high priest disappearing into that awful solitude, with God, as he listened to the chime of bells, swung by his movements, and announcing that still he lived, two conditions stood out broadly before his mind. One was the bringing in of incense: "Thou shalt bring a censer full of burning coals of fire from before the altar, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat" (Lev. xvi. 13). Now, the connection between prayer and incense was quite familiar to the Jew; and he could not but understand that the

blessing of atonement was to be sought and won by intense and burning supplication. And the other was that invariable demand, the offering of a victim's blood. All the sacrifices of Judaism culminated in the great act when the high priest, standing in the most holy and the most occult spot in all the world, sprinkled "blood upon the mercy-seat eastwards, and before the mercy-seat sprinkled of the blood with his finger seven times" (Lev. xvi. 14).

Thus the crowning height of the Jewish ritual was attained when the blood of the great national sacrifice was offered not only before God, but, with special reference to the covering up of the broken and accusing law, before the mercy-seat.

No wonder that on either side of it, and moulded of the same mass of metal, were the cherubim in an attitude of adoration, their outspread wings covering it, their faces bent, not only as bowing in reverence before the Divine presence, but, as we expressly read, "toward the mercy-seat shall the faces of the cherubim be." For the meaning of this great symbol was among the things which "the angels desire to look into."

We now understand how much was gained when God said "There will I meet thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat" (ver. 22). It was an assurance, not only of the love which desires obedience, but of the mercy which passes over failure.*

* This investigation offers a fine example of the folly of that kind of interpretation which looks about for some sort of external and arbitrary resemblance, and fastens upon that as the true meaning. Nothing is more common among these expounders than to declare that the wood and gold of the ark are types of the human and Divine natures of our Lord. If either ark or mercy-seat should be compared to Him, it is obviously the latter, which speaks of mercy. But this was of pure gold.

Thus far, there has been symbolised the mind of God, His righteousness and His grace.

The next articles have to do with man, his homage to God and his witness for Him.

There is first the table of the shewbread (vers. 23-30), overlaid with pure gold, surrounded, like the ark, with "a crown" or moulding of gold, for ornament and the greater security of the loaves, and strengthened by a border of pure gold carried around the base, which was also ornamented with a crown, or moulding. Close to this border were rings for staves, like those by which the ark was borne. The table was furnished with dishes upon which, every Sabbath day, new shewbread might be conveyed into the tabernacle, and the old might be removed for the priests to eat. There were spoons also, by which to place frankincense upon each pile of bread; and "flagons and bowls to pour out withal." What was thus to be poured we do not read, but there is no doubt that it was wine, second only to bread as a requisite of Jewish life, and forming, like the frankincense, a link between this weekly presentation and the meal-offerings. But all these were subordinate to the twelve loaves, one for each tribe, which were laid in two piles upon the table. It is clear that their presentation was the essence of the rite, and not their consumption by the priests, which was possibly little more than a safeguard against irreverent treatment. For the word shewbread is literally bread of the face or presence, which word is used of the presence of God, in the famous prayer "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (xxxiii. 15). And of whom, other than God, can it here be reasonably understood? Now Jacob, long before, had vowed "Of all that Thou

givest me, I will surely give the tenth to Thee" (Gen. xxviii. 22). And it was an edifying ordinance that a regular offering should be made to God of the staple necessaries of existence, as a confession that all came from Him, and an appeal, clearly expressed by covering it with frankincense, which typified prayer (Lev. xxiv. 7) that He would continue to supply their need.

Nor is it overstrained to add, that when this bread was given to their priestly representatives to eat, with all reverence and in a holy place, God responded, and gave back to His people that which represented the necessary maintenance of the tribes. Thus it was, "on the behalf of the children of Israel, an everlasting covenant" (Lev. xxiv. 8).

The form has perished. But as long as we confess in the Lord's Prayer that the wealthiest does not possess one day's bread ungiven—as long, also, as Christian families connect every meal with a due acknowledgment of dependence and of gratitude—so long will the Church of Christ continue to make the same confession and appeal which were offered in the shewbread upon the table.

The next article of furniture was the golden candlestick (vers. 31-40). And this presents the curious phenomenon that it is extremely clear in its typical import, and in its material outline; but the details of the description are most obscure, and impossible to be gathered from the Authorised Version. Strictly speaking, it was not a lamp, but only a gorgeous lampstand, with one perpendicular shaft, and six branches, three springing, one above another, from each side of the shaft, and all curving up to the same height. Upon these were laid the seven lamps, which

were altogether separate in their construction (ver. 37). It was of pure gold, the base and the main shaft being of one piece of beaten metal. Each of the six branches was ornamented with three cups, made like almond blossoms; above these a "knop," variously compared by Jewish writers to an apple and a pomegranate, and still higher, a flower or bud. It is believed that there was a fruit and flower above each of the cups, making nine ornaments on each branch. The "candlestick" in ver. 34 can only mean the central shaft, and upon this there were "four cups with their knops and flowers" instead of three. With the lamp were tongs, and snuff-dishes in which to remove the charred wick from the temple.

As we are told that when the Lord called the child Samuel, "the lamp of God was not yet gone out" (1 Sam. iii. 3), it follows that the lights were kept burning only during the night.

We have now to ascertain the spiritual meaning of this stately symbol. There are two other passages in Scripture which take up the figure and carry it forward. In Zechariah (iv. 2-12) we are taught that the separation of the lamps is a mere incident; they are to be conceived of as organically one, and moreover as fed by secret ducts with oil from no limited supply, but from living olive trees, vital, rooted in the system of the universe. Whatever obscurity may veil those "two sons of oil" (and this is not the place to discuss the subject), we are distinctly told that the main lesson is that of lustre derived from supernatural, invisible sources. Zerubbabel is confronted by a great mountain of hindrance, but it shall become a plain before him, because the lesson of the vision of the candlestick is this—"Not by might, nor by power, but

by My Spirit, saith the Lord." A lamp gives light not because the gold shines, but because the oil burns; and yet the oil is the one thing which the eye sees not. And so the Church is a witness for her Lord, a light shining in a dark place, not because of its learning or culture, its noble ritual, its stately buildings or its ample revenues. All these things her children, having the power, ought to dedicate. The ancient symbol put art and preciousness in an honourable place, worthily upholding the lamp itself; and in the New Testament the seven lamps of the Apocalypse were still of gold. But the true function of a lamp is to be luminous, and for this the Church depends wholly upon its supply of grace from God the Holy Ghost. It is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord."

Again, in the Revelation, we find the New Testament Churches described as lamps, among which their Lord habitually walks. And no sooner have the seven churches on earth been warned and cheered, than we are shown before the throne of God seven torches (burning by their own incandescence—*vide* Trench, *N. T. Synonyms*, p. 162), which are the seven spirits of God, answering to His seven light-bearers upon the earth (Rev. iv. 5).

Lastly, the perfect and mystic number, seven, declares that the light of the Church, shining in a dark place, ought to be full and clear, no imperfect presentation of the truth: "they shall light the lamps, to give light over against it."

Because this lamp shines with the light of the Church, exhibiting the graces of her Lord, therefore a special command is addressed to the people, besides the call for contributions to the work in general, that they shall bring pure olive oil, not obtained by heat

and pressure, but simply beaten, and therefore of the best quality, to feed its flame.

It is to burn, as the Church ought to shine in all darkness of the conscience or the heart of man, from evening to morning for ever. And the care of the ministers of God is to be the continual tending of this blessed and sacred flame.

THE PATTERN IN THE MOUNT.

xxv. 9, 40.

Twice over (vers. 9, 40, and cf. xxvi. 30, xxvii. 8, etc.) Moses was reminded to be careful to make all things after the pattern shown him in the mount. And these words have sometimes been so strained as to convey the meaning that there really exists in heaven a tabernacle and its furniture, the grand original from which the Mosaic copy was derived.

That is plainly not what the Epistle to the Hebrews understands (Heb. viii. 5). For it urges this admonition as a proof that the old dispensation was a shadow of ours, in which Christ enters into heaven itself, and our consciences are cleansed from dead works to serve the living God. The citation is bound indissolubly with all the demonstration which follows it.

We are not, then, to think of a heavenly tabernacle, exhibited to the material senses of Moses, with which all the details of his own work must be identical.

Rather we are to conceive of an inspiration, an ideal, a vision of spiritual truths, to which all this work in gold and acacia-wood should correspond. It was thus that Socrates told Glaucon, incredulous of his republic, that in heaven there is laid up a pattern, for him that wishes to behold it. Nothing short of this

would satisfy the inspired application of the words in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the readers, who were Jewish converts, are asked to recognise in this verse evidence that the light of the new dispensation illuminated the institutions of the old.

Without this pervading sentiment, the most elaborate specifications of weight and measurement, of cup and pomegranate and flower, could never have produced the required effect. An ideal there was, a divinely designed suggestiveness, which must be always present to his superintending vigilance, as once it shone upon his soul in sacred vision or trance; a suggestiveness which might possibly be lost amid correct elaborations, like the soul of a poem or a song, evaporating through a rendering which is correct enough, yet in which the spirit, even if that alone, has been forgotten.

It is surely a striking thing to find this need of a pervading sentiment impressed upon the author of the first piece of religious art that ever was recognised by heaven.

For it is the mysterious all-pervading charm of such a dominant sentiment which marks the impassable difference between the lowliest work of art, and the highest piece of art-manufacture which is only a manufactured article.

And assuredly the recognition of this principle among a people whose ancient history shows but little interest in art, calls for some attention from those who regard the tabernacle itself as a fiction, and its details as elaborated in Babylonia, in the priestly interest. (Kuenen, *Relig. of Israel*, ii. 148).

The problem of problems for all who deny the divinity of the Old Testament is to explain the curious position which its institutions are consistent in accept-

ing. They rest on the authority of heaven, and yet they are not definitive, but provisional. They are always looking forward to another prophet like their founder, a new covenant better than the present one, a high priest after the order of a Canaanite enthroned at the right hand of Jehovah, a consecration for every pot in the city like that of the vessels in the temple (Deut. xviii. 15; Jer. xxxi. 31; Ps. cx. 1, 4; Zech. xiv. 20). And here, "in the priestly interest," is an avowal that the Divine habitation which they boast of is but the likeness and shadow of some Divine reality concealed. And these strange expectations have proved to be the most fruitful and energetic principles in their religion.

This very presence of the ideal is what will for ever make the highest natures quite certain that the visible universe is no mere resultant of clashing forces without a soul, but the genuine work of a Creator. The universe is charged throughout with the most powerful appeals to all that is artistic and vital within us; so that a cataract is more than water falling noisily, and the silence of midnight more than the absence of disturbance, and a snow mountain more than a storehouse to feed the torrents in summer, being also poems, appeals, revelations, whispers from a spirit, heard in the depth of ours.

Does any one, listening to Beethoven's funeral march, doubt the utterance of a soul, as distinct from clanging metal and vibrating chords? And the world has in it this mysterious witness to something more than heat and cold, moisture and drought: something which makes the difference between a well-filled granary and a field of grain rippling golden in the breeze. This is not a coercive argument for the hostile logic-monger:

it is an appeal for the open heart. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

To fill the tabernacle of Moses with spiritual meaning, the ideal tabernacle was revealed to him in the Mount of God.

Let us apply the same principle to human life. There also harmony and unity, a pervading sense of beauty and of soul, are not to be won by mere obedience to a mandate here and a prohibition there. Like Moses, it is not by labour according to specification that we may erect a shrine for deity. Those parables which tell of obedient toil would be sadly defective, therefore, without those which speak of love and joy, a supper, a Shepherd bearing home His sheep, a prodigal whose dull expectation of hired service is changed for investiture with the best robe and the gold ring, and welcome of dance and music.

How shall our lives be made thus harmonious, a spiritual poem and not a task, a chord vibrating under the musician's hand? How shall thought and word, desire and deed, become like the blended voices of river and wind and wood, a witness for the divine? Not by mere elaboration of detail (though correctness is a condition of all true art), but by a vision before us of the divine life, the Ideal, the pattern shown to all, and equally to be imitated (strange though it may seem) by peasant and prince, by woman and sage and child.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TABERNACLE.

xxvi.

WE now come to examine the structure of the tabernacle for which the most essential furniture has been prepared.

Some confusion of thought exists, even among educated laymen, with regard to the arrangements of the temple; and this has led to similar confusion (to a less extent) concerning the corresponding parts of the tabernacle "The temple" in which the Child Jesus was found, and into which Peter and John went up to pray, ought not to be confounded with that inner shrine, "the temple," in which it was the lot of the priest Zacharias to burn incense, and into which Judas, forgetful of all its sacredness in his anguish, hurled his money to the priests (Luke ii. 46; Acts iii. 3; Luke i. 9; Matt. xxvii. 5). Now, the former of these corresponded to "the court of the tabernacle," an enclosure open to the skies, and containing two important articles, the altar of burnt sacrifices and the laver. This was accessible to the nation, so that the sinner could lay his hand upon the head of his offering, and the priests could purify themselves before entering their own sacred place, the tabernacle proper, the shrine. But when we come to the structure itself, some attention is still

necessary, in order to derive any clear notion from the description; nor can this easily be done by an English reader without substituting the Revised Version for the Authorised. He will then discover that we have a description, first of the "curtains of the tabernacle" (vers. 1-6), and then of other curtains which are not considered to belong to the tabernacle proper, but to "the tent over the tabernacle" (7-13), being no part of the rich ornamental interior, but only a protection spread above it; and over this again were two further screens from the weather (14), and finally, inside all, are "the boards of the tabernacle"—of which boards the two actual apartments were constructed (15-30)—and the veil which divided the Holy from the Most Holy Place (31-3).

"The curtains of the tabernacle" were ten, made of linen, of which every thread consisted of fine strands twisted together, "and blue and purple and scarlet," with cherubim not embroidered but woven into the fabric (1).

These curtains were sewn together, five and five, so as to make two great curtains, each slightly larger than forty-two feet by thirty, being twenty-eight cubits long by five times four cubits broad (2, 3). Finally these two were linked together, each having fifty loops for that purpose at corresponding places at the edge, which loops were bound together by fifty golden clasps (4-6). Thus, when the nation was about to march, they could easily be divided in the middle and then folded in the seams.

This costly fabric was regarded as part of the true tabernacle: why, then, do we find the outer curtains mentioned before the rest of the tabernacle proper is described?

Certainly because these rich curtains lie immediately underneath the coarser ones, and are to be considered along with "the tent" which covered all (7). This consisted of curtains of goats' hair, of the same size, and arranged in all respects like the others, except that their clasps were only bronze, and that the curtains were eleven in number, instead of ten, so that half a curtain was available to hang down over the back, and half was to be doubled back upon itself at the front of "the tabernacle," that is to say, the richer curtains underneath. The object of this is obvious: it was to bring the centre of the goatskin curtains over the edge of the linen ones, as tiles overlap each other, to shut out the rain at the joints. But this implies, what has been said already, that the curtains of the tabernacle should lie close to the curtains of the tent.

Over these again was an outer covering of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering of sealskins above all (14). This last, it is generally agreed, ran only along the top, like a ridge tile, to protect the vulnerable part of the roof. And now it has to be remembered that we are speaking of a real tent with sloping sides, not a flat cover laid upon the flat inner structure of boards, and certain to admit the rain. By calling attention to this fact, Mr. Fergusson succeeded in solving all the problems connected with the measurements of the tabernacle, and bringing order into what was little more than chaos before (*Smith's Bible Dict.*, "Temple").

The inner tabernacle was of acacia wood, which was the only timber of the sanctuary. Each board stood ten cubits high, and was fitted by tenons into two silver sockets, which probably formed a continuous base. Each of these contained a talent of silver, and was therefore more than eighty pounds weight; and they

were probably to some extent sunk into the ground for a foundation (xxxviii. 27). There were twenty boards on each side; and as they were a cubit and a half broad, the length of the tabernacle was about forty-five feet (16-18). At the west end there were six boards (22), which, with the breadth of the two posts or boards for the corners (23-4) just gives ten cubits, or fifteen feet, for the width of it. Thus the length of the tabernacle was three times its breadth; and we know that in the Temple (where all the proportions were the same, the figures being doubled throughout) the subdividing veil was so hung as to make the inner shrine a perfect square, leaving the holy place twice as long as it was broad.

The posts were held in their places by wooden bars, which were overlaid with gold (as the boards also were, ver. 29) and fitted into golden rings. Four such bars, or bolts, ran along a portion of each side, and there was a fifth great bar which stretched along the whole forty-five feet from end to end. Thus the edifice was firmly held together; and the wealth of the material makes it likely that they were fixed on the inside, and formed a part of the ornament of the edifice (26-9).

When the two curtains were fastened together with clasps, they gave a length of sixty feet. But we have seen that the length of the boards when jointed together was only forty-five feet. This gives a projection of seven feet and a half (five cubits) for the front and rear of the tent beyond the tabernacle of boards; and when the great curtains were drawn tight, sloping from the ridge-pole fourteen cubits on each side, it has been shown (assuming a right-angle at the top) that they reached within five cubits of the ground, and extended five cubits beyond the sides, the same distance as at

the front and rear. The next instructions concern the veil which divided the two chambers of the sanctuary. This was in all respects like "the curtain of the tabernacle," and similarly woven with cherubim. It was hung upon four pillars; and the even number seems to prove that there was no higher one in the centre, reaching to the roof—which seems to imply that there was a triangular opening above the veil, between the Holy and the Most Holy Place (31, 32).

But here a difficult question arises. There is no specific measurement of the point at which this subdividing veil was to stretch across the tent. The analogy of the Temple inclines us to believe that the Most Holy Place was a perfect cube, and the Holy Place twice as long as it was broad and high. There is evident allusion to this final shape of the Most Holy Place in the description of the New Jerusalem, of which the length and breadth and height were equal. And yet there is strong reason to suspect that this arrangement was not the primitive one. For Moses was ordered to stretch the veil underneath the golden clasps which bound together the two great curtains of the tabernacle (ver. 33). But these were certainly in the middle. How, then, could the veil make an unequal division below? Possibly fifteen feet square would have been too mean a space for the dimensions of the Most Holy Place, although the perfect cube became desirable, when the size was doubled.

A screen of the same rich material, but apparently not embroidered with cherubim, was to stretch across the door of the tent; but this was supported on five pillars instead of four, clearly that the central one might support the ridge-bar of the roof. And their sockets were of brass (vers. 36, 37).

The tabernacle, like the Temple, had its entrance on the east (ver. 22); and in the case of the Temple this was the more remarkable, because the city lay at the other side, and the worshippers had to pass round the shrine before they reached the front of it. The object was apparently to catch the warmth of the sun. For a somewhat similar reason, every pagan temple in the ancient world, with a few well-defined exceptions which are easily explained, also faced the east; and the worshippers, with their backs to the dawn, saw the first beams of the sun kindling their idol's face. The orientation of Christian churches is due to the custom which made the neophyte, standing at first in his familiar position westward, renounce the devil and all his works, and then, turning his back upon his idols, recite the creed with his face eastward.

What ideas would be suggested by this edifice to the worshipper will better be examined when we have examined also the external court.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE OUTER COURT.

xxvii.

BEFORE describing the tabernacle, its furniture was specified. And so, when giving instructions for the court of the tabernacle, the altar has to be described: "Thou shalt make the altar of acacia wood." The definite article either implies that an altar was taken for granted, a thing of course; or else it points back to chap. xx. 24, which said "An altar of earth shalt thou make." Nor is the acacia wood of this altar at all inconsistent with that precept, it being really not an altar but an altar-case, and "hollow" (ver. 8)—an arrangement for holding the earth together, and preventing the feet of the priests from desecrating it. At each corner was a horn, of one piece with the framework, typical of the power which was there invoked, and practically useful, both to bind the sacrifice with cords, and also for the grasp of the fugitive, seeking sanctuary (Ps. cxviii. 27; 1 Kings i. 50). This arrangement is said to have been peculiar to Judaism. And as the altar was outside the tabernacle, and both symbolism and art prescribed simpler materials, it was overlaid with brass (vers. 1, 2). Of the same material were the vessels necessary for the treatment of the fire and blood (ver. 3). A network

of brass protected the lower part of the altar; and at half the height a ledge projected, supported by this network, and probably wide enough to allow the priests to stand upon it when they ministered (vers. 4, 5). Hence we read that Aaron "came down from offering" (Lev. ix. 22). Lastly, there was the same arrangement of rings and staves to carry it as for the ark and the table (vers. 6, 7).

It will be noticed that the laver in this court, like the altar of incense within, is reserved for mention in a later chapter (xxx. 18) as being a subordinate feature in the arrangements.

The enclosure was a quadrangle of one hundred cubits by fifty; it was five cubits high, and each cubit may be taken as a foot and a half. The linen which enclosed it was upheld by pillars with sockets of brass; and one of the few additional facts to be gleaned from the detailed statement that all these directions were accurately carried out is that the heads of all the pillars were overlaid with silver (xxxviii. 17). The pillars were connected by rods (fillets) of silver, and a hanging of fine-twined linen was stretched by means of silver hooks (9-13). The entrance was twenty cubits wide, corresponding accurately to the width, not of the tabernacle, but of "the tent" as it has been described (reaching out five cubits farther on each side than the tabernacle), and it was closed by an embroidered curtain (14-17). This fence was drawn firmly into position and held there by brazen tent-pins; and we here incidentally learn that so was the tent itself (19).

[For verses 20, 21, see page 423.]

We are now in a position to ask what sentiment all

these arrangements would inspire in the mind of the simple and somewhat superstitious worshippers.

Approaching it from outside, the linen enclosure (being seven feet and a half high) would conceal everything but the great roof of the tent, one uniform red, except for the sealskin covering along the summit. A gloomy and menacing prospect, broken possibly by some gleams, if the curtain of the gable were drawn back, from the gold with which every portion of the shrine within was plated.

So does the world outside look askance upon the Church, discerning a mysterious suggestion everywhere of sternness and awe, yet with flashes of strange splendour and affluence underneath the gloom.

In this place God is known to be: it is a tent, not really "of the congregation," but "of meeting" between Jehovah and His people: "the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, . . . and there I will meet with the children of Israel" (xxix. 42-3). And so the Israelite, though troubled by sin and fear, is attracted to the gate, and enters. Right in front stands the altar: this obtrudes itself before all else upon his attention: he must learn its lesson first of all. Especially will he feel that this is so if a sacrifice is now to be offered, since the official must go farther into the court to wash at the laver, and then return; so that a loss of graduated arrangement has been accepted in order to force the altar to the front. And he will soon learn that not only must every approach to the sacred things within be heralded by sacrifice upon this altar, but the blood of the victim must be carried as a passport into the shrine. Surely he remembers how the blood of the lamb saved his own life when the firstborn of Egypt died: he knows that it is

written "The life (or soul) of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls (or lives): for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life (or soul)" (Lev. xvii. 11).

No Hebrew could watch his fellow-sinner lay his hand on a victim's head, and confess his sin before the blow fell on it, without feeling that sin was being, in some mysterious sense, "borne" for him. The intricacies of our modern theology would not disturb him, but this is the sentiment by which the institutions of the tabernacle assuredly ministered comfort and hope to him. Strong would be his hope as he remembered that the service and its solace were not of human devising, that God had "given it to him upon the altar to make atonement for his soul."

Taking courage, therefore, the worshipper dares to lift up his eyes. And beyond the altar he sees a vision of dazzling magnificence. The inner roof, most unlike the sullen red of the exterior, is blazing with various colours, and embroidered with emblems of the mysterious creatures of the sky, winged, yet not utterly afar from human in their suggestiveness. Encompassed and looked down into by these is the tabernacle, all of gold. If the curtain is raised he sees a chamber which tells what the earth should be—a place of consecrated energies and resources, and of sacred illumination, the oil of God burning in the sevenfold vessel of the Church. Is this blessed place for him, and may he enter? Ah, no! and surely his heart would grow heavy with consciousness that reconciliation was not yet made perfect, when he learned that he must never approach the place where God had promised to meet with him.

Much less might he penetrate the awful chamber

within, the true home of deity. There, he knows, is the record of the mind of God, the concentrated expression of what is comparatively easy to obey in act, but difficult beyond hope to love, to accept and to be conformed to. That record is therefore at once the revelation of God and the condemnation of His creature. Yet over this, he knows well, there is poised no dead image such as were then adored in Babylonian and Egyptian fanes, but a spiritual Presence, the glory of the invisible God. Nor was He to be thought of as in solitude, loveless, or else needing human love: above Him were the woven seraphim of the curtain, and on either side a seraph of beaten gold—types, it may be, of all the created life which He inhabits, or else pictures of His sinless creatures of the upper world. And yet this pure Being, to Whom the companionship of sinful man is so little needed, is there to meet with man; and is pleased not to look upon His violated law, but to command that a slab, inestimably precious, shall interpose between it and its Avenger. By whom, then, shall this most holy floor be trodden? By the official representative of him who gazes, and longs, and is excluded. He enters not without blood, which he is careful to sprinkle upon all the furniture, but chiefly and seven times upon the mercy-seat.

Thus every worshipper carries away a profound consciousness that he is utterly unworthy, and yet that his unworthiness has been expiated; that he is excluded, and yet that his priest, his representative, has been admitted, and therefore that he may hope. The Holy Ghost did not declare by sign that no way into the Holiest existed, but only that it was not yet made manifest. Not yet.

This leads us to think of the priest.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"THE HOLY GARMENTS."

xxviii.

THE tabernacle being complete, the priesthood has to be provided for. Its dignity is intimated by the command to Moses to bring his brother Aaron and his sons near to himself (clearly in rank, because the object is defined, "that he may minister unto Me"), and also by the direction to make "holy garments for glory and for beauty." But just as the furniture is treated before the shrine, and again before the court-yard, so the vestments are provided before the priesthood is itself discussed.

The holiness of the raiment implies that separation to office can be expressed by official robes in the Church as well as in the state; and their glory and beauty show that God, Who has clothed His creation with splendour and with loveliness, does not dissever religious feeling from artistic expression.

All that are wise-hearted in such work, being inspired by God as really, though not as profoundly, as if their task were to foretell the advent of Messiah, are to unite their labours upon these garments.

The order in the twenty-eighth chapter is perhaps that of their visible importance. But it will be clearer to describe them in the order in which they were put on.

Next the flesh all the priests were clad from the loins to the thighs in close-fitting linen: the indecency of many pagan rituals must be far from them, and this was a perpetual ordinance, "that they bear not iniquity and die" (xxviii. 42-3).

Over this was a tight-fitting "coat" (a shirt rather) of fine linen, white, but woven in a chequered pattern, without seam, like the robe of Jesus, and bound together with a girdle (39-43).

These garments were common to all the priests; but their "head-tires" differed from the impressive mitre of the high priest. The rest of the vestments in this chapter belong to him alone.

Over the "coat" he wore the flowing "robe of the ephod," all blue, little seen from the waist up, but uncovered thence to the feet, and surrounded at the hem with golden pomegranates, the emblem of fruitfulness, and with bells to enable the worshippers outside to follow the movements of their representative. He should die if this expression of his vicarious function were neglected (31-35).

Above this robe was the ephod itself—a kind of gorgeous jacket, made in two pieces which were joined at the shoulders, and bound together at the waist by a cunningly woven band, which was of the same piece. This ephod, like the curtains of the tabernacle, was of blue and purple and scarlet and fine-twined linen; but added to these were threads of gold, and we read, as if this were a novelty which needed to be explained, that they beat the gold into thin plates and then cut it into threads (xxxix. 3, xxviii. 6-8).

Upon the shoulders were two stones, rightly perhaps called onyx, and set in "ouches"—of filagree work, as the word seems to say. Upon them were engraven

the names of the twelve tribes, the burden of whose sins and sorrows he should bear into the presence of his God, "for a memorial" (9-12).

Upon the ephod was the breastplate, fastened to it by rings and chains of twisted gold, made to fold over into a square, a span in measurement, and blazing with twelve gems, upon which were engraved, as upon the onyxes on the shoulders, the names of the twelve tribes. All attempts to derive edification from the nature of these jewels must be governed by the commonplace reflection that we cannot identify them; and many of the present names are incorrect. It is almost certain that neither topaz, sapphire nor diamond could have been engraved, as these stones were, with the name of one of the twelve tribes (13-30).

"In the breastplate" (that is, evidently, between the folds as it was doubled), were placed those mysterious means of ascertaining the will of God, the Urim and the Thummim, the Lights and the Perfections; but of their nature, or of the manner in which they became significant, nothing can be said that is not pure conjecture (30).

Lastly, there was a mitre of white linen, and upon it was laced with blue cords a gold plate bearing the inscription "Holy to Jehovah" (36, 37).

No mention is made of shoes or sandals; and both from the commandment to Moses at the burning bush, and from history, it is certain that the priests officiated with their feet bare.

The picture thus completed has the clearest ethical significance. There is modesty, reverence, purity, innocence typified by whiteness, the grandeur of the office of intercession displayed in the rich colours and precious jewels by which that whiteness was relieved,

sympathy expressed by the names of the people in the breastplate that heaved with every throb of his heart, responsibility confessed by the same names upon the shoulder, where the government was said to press like a load (Isa. ix. 6); and over all, at once the condition and the explanation of the rest, upon the seat of intelligence itself, the golden inscription on the forehead, "Holy to Jehovah."

Such was the import of the raiment of the high priest: let us see how it agrees with the nature of his office.

THE PRIESTHOOD.

What, then, are the central ideas connected with the institution of a priesthood?

Regarding it in the broadest way, and as a purely human institution, we may trace it back to the eternal conflict in the breast of man between two mighty tendencies—the thirst for God and the dread of Him, a strong instinct of approach and a repelling sense of unworthiness.

In every age and climate, man prays. If any curious inquirer into savage habits can point to the doubtful exception of a tribe seemingly without a ritual, he will not really show that religion is one with superstition; for they who are said to have escaped its grasp are never the most advanced and civilised among their fellows upon that account,—they are the most savage and debased, they are to humanity what the only people which has formally renounced God is fast becoming among the European races.

Certainly history cannot exhibit one community, progressive, energetic and civilised, which did not feel that more was needful and might be had than its own

resources could supply, and stretch aloft to a Supreme Being the hands which were so deft to handle the weapon and the tool. Certainly all experience proves that the foundations of national greatness are laid in national piety, so that the practical result of worship, and of the belief that God responds, has not been to dull the energies of man, but to inspire him with the self-respect befitting a confidant of deity, and to brace him for labours worthy of one who draws, from the sense of Divine favour, the hope of an infinite advance.

And yet, side by side with this spiritual gravitation, there has always been recoil and dread, such as was expressed when Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look upon God.

Now, it is not this apprehension, taken alone, which proves man to be a fallen creature: it is the combination of the dread of God with the desire of Him. Why should we shrink from our supreme Good, except as a sick man turns away from his natural food? He is in an unnatural and morbid state of body, and we of soul.

Thus divided between fear and attraction, man has fallen upon the device of commissioning some one to represent him before God. The priest on earth has come by the same road with so many other mediators—angel and demigod, saint and virgin.

At first it has been the secular chief of the family, tribe or nation, who has seemed least unworthy to negotiate as well with heaven as with centres of interest upon earth. But by degrees the duty has everywhere been transferred into professional hands, patriarch and king recoiling, feeling the inconsistency of his earthly duties with these sacred ones, finding his hands to be too soiled and his heart too heavily weighted with sin for the tremendous Presence into which the family or

the tribe would press him. And yet the union of the two functions might be the ideal; and the sigh of all truly enlightened hearts might be for a priest sitting upon his throne, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. But thus it came to pass that an official, a clique, perhaps a family, was chosen from among men in things pertaining to God, and the institution of the priesthood was perfected.

Now, this is the very process which is recognised in Scripture; for these two conflicting forces were altogether sound and right. Man ought to desire God, for Whom he was created, and Whose voice in the garden was once so welcome: but also he ought to shrink back from Him, afraid now, because he is conscious of his own nakedness, because he has eaten of the forbidden fruit.

Accordingly, as the nation is led out from Egypt, we find that its intercourse with heaven is at once real and indirect. The leader is virtually the priest as well, at whose intercession Amalek is vanquished and the sin of the golden calf is pardoned, who entered the presence of God and received the law upon their behalf, when they feared to hear His voice lest they should die, and by whose hand the blood of the covenant was sprinkled upon the people, when they had sworn to obey all that the Lord had said (xvii. 11, xxxii. 30, xx. 19, xxiv. 8).

Soon, however, the express command of God provided for an orthodox and edifying transfer of the priestly function from Moses to his brother Aaron. Some such division of duties between the secular chief and the religious priest would no doubt have come, in Israel as elsewhere, as soon as Moses disappeared; but it might have come after a very different fashion, associated with heresy and schism.

Especially would it have been demanded why the family of Moses, if the chieftainship must pass away from it, could not retain the religious leadership. We know how cogent such a plea would have appeared; for, although the transfer was made publicly and by his own act, yet no sooner did the nation begin to split into tribal subdivisions, amid the confused efforts of each to conquer its own share of the inheritance, than we find the grandson of Moses securely establishing himself and his posterity in the apostate and semi-idolatrous worship of Shechem (Judg. xviii. 30, R.V.).

And why should not this illustrious family have been chosen?

Perhaps because it was so illustrious. A priesthood of that great line might seem to have earned its office, and to claim special access to God, like the heathen priests, by virtue of some special desert. Therefore the honour was transferred to the far less eminent line of Aaron, and that in the very hour when he was lending his help to the first great apostacy, the type of the many idolatries into which Israel was yet to fall. So, too, the whole tribe of Levi was in some sense consecrated, not for its merit, but because, through the sin of its founder, it lacked a place and share among its brethren, being divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel by reason of the massacre of Shechem (Gen. xlix. 7).

Thus the nation, conscious of its failure to enjoy intercourse with heaven, found an authorised expression for its various and conflicting emotions. It was not worthy to commune with God, and yet it could not rest without Him. Therefore a spokesman, a representative, an ambassador, was given to it. But he was chosen after such a fashion as to

shut out any suspicion that the merit of Levi had prevailed where that of Israel at large had failed. It was not because Levi executed vengeance on the idolaters that he was chosen, for the choice was already made, and made in the person of Aaron, who was so far from blameless in that offence.

And perhaps this is the distinguishing peculiarity of the Jewish priest among others: that he was chosen from among his brethren, and simply as one of them; so that while his office was a proof of their exclusion, it was also a kind of sacrament of their future admission, because he was their brother and their envoy, and entered not as outshining but as representing them, their forerunner for them entering. The almond rod of Aaron was dry and barren as the rest, until the miraculous power of God invested it with blossoms and fruit.

Throughout the ritual, the utmost care was taken to inculcate this double lesson of the ministry. Into the Holy Place, whence the people were excluded, a whole family could enter. But there was an inner shrine, whither only the high priest might penetrate, thus reducing the family to a level with the nation; "the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the Holy Place hath not yet been made manifest, while as the first tabernacle (the outer shrine—ver. 6) was yet standing" (Heb. ix. 8).

Thus the people felt a deeper awe, a broader separation. And yet, when the sole and only representative who was left to them entered that "shrine, remote, occult, untrod," they saw that the way was not wholly barred against human footsteps: the lesson suggested was far from being that of absolute despair, —it was, as the Epistle to the Hebrews said, "Not

yet." The prophet Zechariah foresaw a time wh n the bells of the horses should bear the same consecrating legend that shone upon the forehead of the priest: HOLY UNTO THE LORD (Zech. xiv. 20).

It is important to observe that the only book of the New Testament in which the priesthood is discussed dwells quite as largely upon the difference as upon the likeness between the Aaronic and the Messianic priest. The latter offered but one Sacrifice for sins, the former offered for himself before doing so for the people (Heb. x. 12). The latter was a royal Priest, and of the order of a Canaanite (Heb. vii. 1-4), thus breaking down all the old system at one long-predicted blow—for if He were on earth He could not so much as be a priest at all (Heb. viii. 4)—and with it all the old racial monopolies, all class distinctions, being Himself of a tribe as to which Moses spake nothing concerning priests (Heb. vii. 14). Every priest standeth, but this priest hath for ever sat down, and even at the right hand of God (Heb. x. 11, 12).

In one sense this priesthood belongs to Christ alone. In another sense it belongs to all who are made one with Him, and therefore a kingly priesthood unto God. But nowhere in the New Testament is the name by which He is designated bestowed upon any earthly minister by virtue of his office. The presbyter is never called *sacerdos*. And perhaps the heaviest blow ever dealt to popular theology was the misapplying of the New Testament epithet (elder, presbyter or priest) to designate the sacerdotal functions of the Old Testament, and those of Christ which they foreshadowed. It is not the word "priest" that is at fault, but some other word for the Old Testament official which is lacking, and cannot now be supplied.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CONSECRATION SERVICES.

xxix.

THE priest being now selected, and his raiment so provided as that it shall speak of his office and its glory, there remains his consecration.

In our day there is a disposition to make light of the formal setting apart of men and things for sacred uses. If God, we are asked, has called one to special service, is not that enough? What more can earth do to commission the chosen of the sky? But the plain answer which we ought to have the courage to return is that this is not at all enough. For God Himself had already called Paul and Barnabas when He said to such folk as Simeon Niger and Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts xiii. 1-4). And these obscure people not only laid their hands upon the great apostle, but actually sent him forth. Now, if he was not exempted from the need of an orderly commission by the marvellous circumstances of his call, by his apostleship not of man, by the explicit announcement that he was a chosen vessel to bear the sacred name before kings and peoples, it is startling to be told of some shallow modern evangelist, who works for no Church and submits to no discipline, that he can

dispense with the sanction of human ordination because he is so clearly sent of heaven.

The example of the Old Testament will no doubt be brushed aside as if the religion which Jesus learned and honoured were a mere human superstition. Or else it would be natural to ask, Is it because the offices and functions of Judaism were more formal, more perfunctory than ours, that a greater spiritual grace went with their appointments than with the laying on of hands in the Christian Church, a rite so clearly sanctioned in the New Testament?

It is written of Joshua that Moses was to lay his hands upon him, because already the Spirit was in him; and of Timothy that he had unfeigned faith, and that prophecies went before concerning him (Num. xxvii. 18; 1 Tim. i. 18; 2 Tim. i. 5). But in neither dispensation did special grace fail to accompany the official separation to sacred office: Joshua was full of the Spirit of Wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; and Timothy was bidden to stir into flame that gift of God which was in him through the laying on of the Apostle's hands (Deut. xxxiv. 9; 2 Tim. i. 6).

Accordingly there is great stress laid upon the orderly institution of the priest. And yet, to make it plain that his authority is only "for his brethren," Moses, the chief of the nation, is to officiate throughout the ceremony of consecration. He it is who shall offer the sacrifices upon the altar, and sprinkle the blood, not upon the first day only, but throughout the ceremonies of the week.

In the first place certain victims must be held in readiness—a bullock and two rams; and with these must be brought in one basket unleavened bread, and unleavened cakes made with oil, and unleavened wafers

on which oil is poured. Then, at the door of the tent of the meeting of man with God, a ceremonial washing must follow, in a laver yet to be provided. Here the assertion that purity is needed, and that it is not inherent, is too plain to be dwelt upon.

But such details as the assuming of the existence of a laver, for which no directions have yet been given (and presently also of the anointing oil, the composition of which is still untold), deserve notice. They are much more in the manner of one who is working out a plan, seen already by his mental vision, but of which only the salient and essential parts have been as yet stated, than of any priest of the latter days, who would first have completed his catalogue of the furniture, and only then have described the ceremonies in which he was accustomed to see all this apparatus take its appointed place.

What we actually find is quite natural to a creative imagination, striking out the broad design of the work and its uses first, and then filling in the outlines. It is not natural at a time when freshness and inspiration have departed, and squared timber, as we are told, has taken the place of the living tree.

The priest, when cleansed, was next to be clad in his robes of office, with the mitre on his head, and upon the mitre the golden plate, with its inscription, which is here called, as the culminating object in all his rich array, "the holy crown" (ver. 6).

And then he was to be anointed. Now, the use of oil, in the ceremony of investiture to office, is peculiar to revealed religion. And whether we suppose it to refer to the oil in a lamp, invisible, yet the secret source of all its illuminating power, or to that refreshment and renovated strength bestowed

offer up to God the symbol of a devoted life. Again, therefore, the hands of Aaron and his sons are laid upon the head of the ram, because they come to offer what represents themselves in another sense than that of expiation—a sweet savour now, an offering made by fire unto Jehovah (ver. 18). And to show that it is perfectly acceptable to Him, the whole ram shall be burnt upon the altar, and not now without the camp: "it is a burnt-offering unto the Lord." Such is the appointed way of God with man—first expiation, then devotion.

The third animal was a "peace-offering" (ver. 28). This is wrongly explained to mean an offering by which peace is made, for then there could be no meaning in what went before. It is the offering of one who is now in a state of peace with God, and who is therefore himself, in many cases, allowed to partake of what he brings. But on this occasion some quite peculiar ceremonies were introduced, and the ram is called by a strange name—"the ram of consecration." When Aaron and his sons have again declared their connection with the animal by laying their hands upon it, it is slain. And then the blood is applied to the tip of their right ear, the thumb of their right hand, and the great toe of their right foot, that the ear may hearken, and the best energies obey, and their life become as that of the consecrated animal, their bodies being presented, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. Then the same blood, with the oil which spoke of heavenly anointing, was sprinkled upon them and upon their official robes, and all were hallowed. Then the fattest and richest parts of the animal were taken, with a loaf, a cake, and a wafer from the basket, and placed in the

hands of Aaron and his sons. This was their formal investiture with official rights; although not yet performing service, it was as priests that they received these; and their hands, swayed by those of Moses, solemnly waved them before the Lord in formal presentation, after which the pieces were consumed by fire. The breast was likewise waved, and became the perpetual property of Aaron and his sons—although on this occasion it passed from their hands to be the portion of Moses, who officiated. The remainder of the flesh, seethed in a holy place, belonged to Aaron and his sons. No stranger (of another family) might eat it, and what was left until morning should be consumed by fire, that is to say, destroyed in a manner absolutely clean, seeing no corruption.

For seven days this rite of consecration was repeated; and every day the altar also was cleansed, rendering it most holy, so that whatever touched it was holy.

Thus the people saw their representative and chief purified, accepted and devoted. Thenceforward, when they too brought their offerings, and beheld them presented (in person or through his subordinates) by the high priest with holiness emblazoned upon his brow, they gained hope, and even assurance, since one so consecrated was bidden to present their intercession; and sometimes they saw him pass into secret places of mysterious sanctity, bearing their tribal name on his shoulder and his bosom, while the chime of golden bells announced his movements, ministering there for them.

But the nation as a whole, with which this historical book is chiefly interested, saw in the high priest the means of continually rendering to God the service of

its loyalty. Every day began and closed with the burnt-offering of a lamb of the first year, along with a meal-offering of fine flour and oil, and a drink-offering of wine. This would be a sweet savour unto God, not after the carnal fashion in which sceptics have interpreted the words, but in the same sense in which the wicked are a smoke in His nostrils from a continually burning fire.

And where this offering was made, the Omnipresent would meet with them. There He would convey His mind to His priest. There also He would meet with all the people—not occasionally, as amid the more impressive but less tolerable splendours of Sinai, but to dwell among them and be their God. And they should know that all this was true, and also that for this He led them out of Egypt: "I am Jehovah their God."

CHAPTER XXX.

INCENSE.

xxx. 1–10.

THE altar of incense was not mentioned when the tent of meeting was being prepared and furnished. But when, in the Divine idea, this is done, when all is ready for the intercourse of God and man, and the priest and the daily victims are provided for, something more than this formal routine of offerings might yet be sought for. This material worship of the senses, this round of splendour and of tragedy, this blaze of gold and gold-encrusted timber, these curtains embroidered in bright colours, and ministers glowing with gems, this blood and fire upon the altar, this worldly sanctuary,—was it all? Or should it not do as nature ever does, which seems to stretch its hands out into the impalpable, and to grow all but spiritual while we gaze; so that the mountain folds itself in vapour, and the ocean in mist and foam, and the rugged stem of the tree is arrayed in fineness of quivering frondage, and it may be of tinted blossom, and around it breathes a subtle fragrance, the most impalpable existence known to sense? Fragrance indeed is matter passing into the immaterial, it is the sigh of the sensuous for the spiritual state of being, it is an aspiration.

And therefore an altar, smaller than that of burnt-offering, but much more precious, being plated all around and on the top with gold (a "golden altar") (xxxix. 38), is now to be prepared, on which incense of sweet spices should be burned whenever a burnt-offering spoke of human devotion, and especially when the daily lamb was offered, every morning and every night.

This altar occupied a significant position. Of necessity, it was without the Most Holy Place, or else it would have been practically inaccessible; and yet it was spiritually in the closest connection with the presence of God within. The Epistle to the Hebrews reckons it among the furniture of the inner shrine* (Heb. ix. 4), close to the veil of which it stood, and within which its burning odours made their sweetness palpable. In the temple of Solomon it was "the altar that belonged to the oracle" (1 Kings vi. 22). In Leviticus (xvi. 12) incense was connected especially with that spot in the Most Holy Place which best expressed the grace that it appealed to, and "the cloud of incense" was to "cover the mercy-seat." Therefore Moses was bidden to put this altar "before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy-seat" (ver. 6).

It can never have been difficult to see the meaning of the rite for which this altar was provided. When Zacharias burned incense the multitude stood without,

* For it is incredible that, in a catalogue of furniture which included Aaron's rod and the pot of manna, this altar should be omitted, and "a golden censer," elsewhere unheard of, substituted. The gloss is too evidently an endeavour to get rid of a difficulty. But in idea and suggestion this altar belonged to the Most Holy. That shrine "had" it, though it actually stood outside.

praying. The incense in the vial of the angel of the Apocalypse was the prayers of the saints (Luke i. 10; Rev. viii. 3). And, long before, when the Psalmist thought of the priest approaching the veil which concealed the Supreme Presence, and there kindling precious spices until their aromatic breath became a silent plea within, it seemed to him that his own heart was even such an altar, whence the perfumed flame of holy longings might be wafted into the presence of his God, and he whispered, "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense" (Ps. cxli. 2).

Such being the import of the type, we need not wonder that it was a perpetual ordinance in their generations, nor yet that no strange perfume might be offered, but only what was prescribed by God. The admixture with prayer of any human, self-asserting, intrusive element, is this unlawful fragrance. It is rhetoric in the leader of extempore prayer; studied inflexions in the conductor of liturgical service; animal excitement, or sentimental pensiveness, or assent which is merely vocal, among the worshippers. It is whatever professes to be prayer, and is not that but a substitute. And formalism is an empty censer.

But, however earnest and pure may seem to be the breathing of the soul to God, something unworthy mingles with what is best in man. The very altar of incense needs to have an atonement made for it once in the year throughout their generations with the blood of the sin-offering of atonement. The prayer of every heart which knows its own secret will be this:

> "Forgive what seemed my sin in me,
> What seemed my worth since I began;
> For merit lives from man to man
> And not from man, O Lord, to Thee."

THE CENSUS.

XXX. 11-16.

Moses by Divine command was soon to number Israel, and thus to lay the foundation for its organisation upon the march. A census was not, therefore, supposed to be presumptuous or sinful in itself; it was the vain-glory of David's census which was culpable.

But the honour of being numbered among the people of God should awaken a sense of unworthiness. Men had reason to fear lest the enrolment of such as they were in the host of God should produce a pestilence to sweep out the unclean from among the righteous. At least they must make some practical admission of their demerit. And therefore every man of twenty years who passed over unto them that were numbered (it is a picturesque glimpse that is here given into the method of enrolment) should offer for his soul a ransom of half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary. And because it was a ransom, the tribute was the same for all; the poor might not bring less, nor the rich more. Here was a grand assertion of the equality of all souls in the eyes of God—a seed which long ages might overlook, but which was sure to fructify in its appointed time.

For indeed the madness of modern levelling systems is only their attempt to level down instead of up, their dream that absolute equality can be obtained, or being obtained can be made a blessing, by the envious demolition of all that is lofty, and not by all together claiming the supreme elevation, the measure of the stature of manhood in Jesus Christ.

It is not in any *phalanstère* of Fourier or Harmony

Hall of Owen, that mankind will ever learn to break a common bread and drink of a common cup; it is at the table of a common Lord.

And so this first assertion of the equality of man was given to those who all ate the same spiritual meat and drank the same spiritual drink.

This half-shekel gradually became an annual impost, levied for the great expenses of the Temple. Thus Joash made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in for the Lord the tax that Moses, the servant of God, laid upon Israel in the wilderness" (2 Chron. xxiv. 9).

And it was the claim for this impost, too rashly conceded by Peter with regard to his Master, which led Jesus to distinguish clearly between His own relation to God and that of others, even of the chosen race.

He paid no ransom for His soul. He was a Son, in a sense in which no other, even of the Jews, could claim to be so. Now, the kings of the earth did not levy tribute from their sons; so that, if Christ paid, it was not to fulfil a duty, but to avoid being an offence. And God Himself would provide, directly and miraculously, what He did not demand from Jesus. Therefore it was that, on this one occasion and no other, Christ Who sought figs when hungry, and when athirst asked water at alien hands, met His own personal requirement by a miracle, as if to protest in deed, as in word, against any burden from such an obligation as Peter's rashness had conceded.

And yet, with that marvellous condescension which shone most brightly when He most asserted His prerogative, He admitted Peter also to a share in this miraculous redemption-money, as He admits us all to a share in His glory in the skies. Is it not He only

Who can redeem His brother, and give to God a ransom for him?

It is the silver thus levied which was used in the construction of the sanctuary. All the other materials were free-will offerings; but even as the entire tabernacle was based upon the ponderous sockets into which the boards were fitted, made of the silver of this tax, so do all our glad and willing services depend upon this fundamental truth, that we are unworthy even to be reckoned His, that we owe before we can bestow, that we are only allowed to offer any gift because He is so merciful in His demand. Israel gladly brought much more than was needed of all things precious. But first, as an absolutely imperative ransom, God demanded from each soul the half of three shillings and sevenpence.

THE LAVER.

xxx. 17-21.

For the cleansing of various sacrifices, but especially for the ceremonial washing of the priests, a laver of brass was to be made, and placed upon a separate base, the more easily to be emptied and replenished.

We have seen already that although its actual use preceded that of the altar, yet the other stood in front of it, as if to assert, to the very eyes of all men, that sacrifice precedes purification. But the use of the laver was not by the man as man, but by the priest as mediator. In his office he represented the absolute purity of Christ. And therefore it was a capital offence to enter the tabernacle or to burn a sacrifice without first having washed the hands and feet. At his inauguration, the whole person of the priest was bathed,

and thenceforth he needed not save to remove the stains of contact with the world.

When the laver was actually made, an interesting fact was recorded about its materials: "He made the laver of brass, and the base of it of brass, of the mirrors of the serving-women which served at the door of the tent of meeting" (xxxviii. 8). Thus their instruments of personal adornment were applied to further a personal preparation of a more solemn kind, like the ointment with which a penitent woman anointed the feet of Jesus. There is a fitness which ought to be considered in the direction of our gifts, not as a matter of duty, but of good taste and charm. And thus also they continually saw the monument of their self-sacrifice. There is an innocent satisfaction, far indeed from vanity, when one looks at his own work for God.

THE ANOINTING OIL AND THE INCENSE.

xxx. 22-38.

We have already seen the meaning of the anointing oil and of the incense.

But we have further to remark that their ingredients were accurately prescribed, that they were to be the best and rarest of their kind, and that special skill was demanded in their preparation.

Such was the natural dictate of reverence in preparing the symbols of God's grace to man, and of man's appeal to God.

With the type of grace should be anointed the tent and the ark, and the table of shewbread and the candlestick, with all their implements, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt sacrifice and

the laver. All the import of every portion of the Temple worship could be realized only by the outpouring of the Spirit of grace.

It was added that this should be a holy anointing oil, not to be made, much less used, for common purposes, on pain of death. The same was enacted of the incense which should burn before Jehovah: "according to the composition thereof ye shall not make for yourselves; it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord: whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, he shall be cut off from his people."

And this was meant to teach reverence. One might urge that the spices and frankincense and salt were not in themselves sacred: there was no consecrating efficacy in their combination, no charm or spell in the union of these, more than of any other drugs. Why, then, should they be denied to culture? Why should her resources be thus restricted? Does any one suppose that such arguments belong peculiarly to the New Testament spirit, or that the saints of the older dispensation had any superstitious views about these ingredients? If it was through such notions that they abstained from vulgarising its use, then they were on the way to paganism, through a materialised worship.

But in truth they knew as well as we that gums were only gums, just as they knew that the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands. And yet they were bidden to reverence both the shrine and the apparatus of His worship, for their own sakes, for the solemnity and sobriety of their feelings, not because God would be a loser if they did otherwise. And we may well ask ourselves, in these latter days, whether the constant proposal to secularise

religious buildings, revenues, endowments and seasons does really indicate greater religious freedom, or only greater freedom from religious control.

And we may be sure that a light treatment of sacred subjects and sacred words is a very dangerous symptom: it is not the words and subjects alone that are being secularised, but also our own souls.

There is in our time a curious tendency among men of letters to use holy things for a mere perfume, that literature may "smell thereto."

A novelist has chosen for the title of a story "Just as I am." An innocent and graceful poet has seen a smile,—

> "'Twas such a smile,
> Aaron's twelve jewels seemed to mix
> With the lamps of the golden candlesticks."

Another is bolder, and sings of the war of love,—

> "In the great battle when the hosts are met
> On Armageddon's plain, with spears beset."

Another thinks of Mazzini as the

> "Dear lord and leader, at whose hand
> The first days and the last days stand,"

and again as he who

> "Said, when all Time's sea was foam,
> 'Let there be Rome,' and there was Rome."

And Victor Hugo did not shrink from describing, and that with a strange and scandalous ignorance of the original incidents, the crucifixion by Louis Napoleon of the Christ of nations.

Now, Scripture is literature, besides being a great deal more; and, as such, it is absurd to object to all

allusions to it in other literature. Yet the tendency of which these extracts are examples is not merely toward allusion, but desecration of solemn and sacred thoughts: it is the conversion of incense into perfumery.

There is another development of the same tendency, by no means modern, noted by the prophet when he complains that the message of God has become as the "very lovely song of one who hath a pleasant voice and playeth well on an instrument." Wherever divine service is only appreciated in so far as it is "well rendered," as rich music or stately enunciation charm the ear, and the surroundings are æsthetic,—wherever the gospel is heard with enjoyment only of the eloquence or controversial skill of its rendering, wherever religion is reduced by the cultivated to a thrill or to a solace, or by the Salvationist to a riot or a romp, wherever Isaiah and the Psalms are only admired as poetry, and heaven is only thought of as a languid and sentimental solace amid wearying cares,—there again is a making of the sacred balms to smell thereto.

And as often as a minister of God finds in his holy office a mere outlet for his natural gifts of rhetoric or of administration, he also is tempted to commit this crime.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BEZALEEL AND AHOLIAB.

xxxi. 1-18.

NEXT after this marking off so sharply of the holy from the profane, this consecration of men to special service, this protection of sacred unguents and sacred gums from secular use, we come upon a passage curiously contrasted, yet not really antagonistic to the last, of marvellous practical wisdom, and well calculated to make a nation wise and great.

The Lord announces that He has called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, and has filled him with the Spirit of God. To what sacred office, then, is he called? Simply to be a supreme craftsman, the rarest of artisans. This also is a divine gift. "I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold and in silver and in brass and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship,"—that is to say, of manual dexterity. With him God had appointed Aholiab; "and in the hearts of all the wise-hearted I have put wisdom." Thus should be fitly made the tabernacle and its furniture, and the finely wrought garments, and the anointing oil and the incense.

So then it appears that the Holy Spirit of God is to be recognised in the work of the carpenter and the jeweller, the apothecary and the tailor. Probably we object to such a statement, so baldly put. But inspiration does not object. Moses told the children of Israel that Jehovah had filled Bezaleel with the Spirit of God, and also Aholiab, for the work "of the engraver . . . and of the embroiderer . . . and of the weaver" (xxxv. 31, 35).

It is quite clear that we must cease to think of the Divine Spirit as inspiring only prayers and hymns and sermons. All that is good and beautiful and wise in human art is the gift of God. We feel that the supreme Artist is audible in the wind among the pines; but is man left to himself when he marshals into more sublime significance the voices of the wind among the organ tubes? At sunrise and sunset we feel that

"On the beautiful mountains the pictures of God are hung";

but is there no revelation of glory and of freshness in other pictures? Once the assertion that a great masterpiece was "inspired" was a clear recognition of the central fire at which all genius lights its lamp: now, alas! it has become little more than a sceptical assumption that Isaiah and Milton are much upon a level. But the doctrine of this passage is the divinity of all endowment; it is quite another thing to claim Divine authority for a given product sprung from the free human being who is so richly crowned and gifted.

Thus far we have smoothed our way by speaking only of poetry, painting, music—things which really compete with nature in their spiritual suggestiveness. But Moses spoke of the robe-maker, the embroiderer, the weaver, and the perfumer.

Nevertheless, the one is carried with the other. Where shall we draw the line, for example, in architecture or in ironwork? And there is another consideration which must not be overlooked. God is assuredly in the growth of humanity, in the progress of true civilisation—in all, the recognition of which makes history philosophical. It is not only the saints who feel themselves to be the instruments of a Greater than they. Cromwell and Bismarck, Columbus, Raleigh and Drake, William the Silent and William the Third, felt it. Mr. Stanley has told us how the consciousness that he was being used grew up in him, not through fanaticism but by slow experience, groping his way through the gloom of Central Africa.

But none will deny that one of the greatest factors in modern history is its industrial development. Is there, then, no sacredness here?

The doctrine of Scripture is not that man is a tool, but that he is responsible for vast gifts, which come directly from heaven—that every good gift is from above, that it was God Himself Who planted in Paradise the tree of knowledge.

Nor would anything do more to restrain the passions, to calm the impulses and to elevate the self-respect of modern life, to call back its energies from the base competition for gold, and make our industries what dreamers persuade themselves that the mediæval industries were, than a quick and general perception of what is meant when faculty goes by such names as talent, endowment, gift—of the glory of its use, the tragedy of its defilement. Many persons, indeed, reject this doctrine because they cannot believe that man has power to abase so high a thing so sadly. But what, then, do they think of the human body?

We are to learn from it the solemn reality of intercession, the power of man with God, Who says not that He will destroy them, but that He will destroy them if left alone. Who can tell, at any moment, what calamities the intercession of the Church is averting from the world or from the nation?

The first prayer of Moses is brief and intense; there is passionate appeal, care for the Divine honour, remembrance of the saintly dead for whose sake the living might yet be spared, and absolute forgetfulness of self. Already the family of Aaron had been preferred to his, but the prospect of monopolising the Divine predestination has no charm for this faithful and patriotic heart. No sooner has the immediate destruction been arrested than he hastens to check the apostates, makes them exhibit the madness of their idolatry by drinking the water in which the dust of their pulverised god was strewn; receives the abject apology of Aaron, thoroughly spirit-broken and demoralised; and finding the sons of Levi faithful, sends them to the slaughter of three thousand men. Yet this is he who said "O Lord, why is Thy wrath hot against Thy people?" He himself felt it needful to cut deep, in mercy, and doubtless in wrath as well, for true affection is not limp and nerveless: it is like the ocean in its depth, and also in its tempests. And the stern action of the Levites appeared to him almost an omen; it was their "consecration," the beginning of their priestly service.

Again he returns to intercede; and if his prayer must fail, then his own part in life is over: let him too perish among the rest. For this is evidently what he means and says: he has not quite anticipated the spirit of Christ in Paul willing to be anathema for his

brethren (Rom. ix. 3), nor has the idea of a vicarious human sacrifice been suggested to him by the institutions of the sanctuary. Yet how gladly would he have died for his people, who made request that he might die among them!

How nobly he foreshadows, not indeed the Christian doctrine, but the love of Christ Who died for man, Who from the Mount of Transfiguration, as Moses from Sinai, came down (while Peter would have lingered) to bear the sins of His brethren! How superior He is to the Christian hymn which pronounces nothing worth a thought, except how to make my own election sure.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PREVAILING INTERCESSION.

xxxiii.

AT this stage the first concession is announced: Moses shall lead the people to their rest, and God will send an angel with him.

We have seen that the original promise of a great Angel in whom was the Divine Presence was full of encouragement and privilege (xxiii. 20). No unbiassed reader can suppose that it is the sending of this same Angel of the Presence which now expresses the absence of God, or that He Who then would not pardon their transgression "because My Name is in Him" is now sent because God, if He were in the midst of them for a moment, would consume them. Nor, when Moses passionately pleads against this degradation, and is heard in this thing also, can the answer "My Presence shall go with thee" be merely the repetition of those evil tidings. Yet it was the Angel of His Presence Who saved them. All this has been already treated, and what we are now to learn is that the faithful and sublime urgency of Moses did really save Israel from degradation and a lower covenant.

It was during the progress of this mediation that Moses distracted by a double anxiety—afraid to

absent himself from his wayward followers, equally afraid to be so long withdrawn from the presence of God as the descending of Sinai and returning thither would involve—made a noble adventure of faith. Inspired by the conception of the tabernacle, he took a tent, "his tent," and pitched it outside the camp, to express the estrangement of the people, and this he called the Tent of the Meeting (with God), but in the Hebrew it is never called the Tabernacle. And God did condescend to meet him there. The mystic cloud guarded the door against presumptuous intrusion, and all the people, who previously wist not what had become of him, had now to confess the majesty of his communion, and they worshipped every man at his tent door.

It would seem that the anxious vigilance of Moses caused him to pass to and fro between the tent and the camp, "but his minister, Joshua the son of Nun, departed not out of the tent."

The dread crisis in the history of the nation was now almost over. God had said, "My Presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest,"—a phrase which the lowly Jesus thought it no presumption to appropriate, saying, "*I* will give you rest," as He also appropriated the office of the Shepherd, the benevolence of the Physician, the tenderness of the Bridegroom, and the glory of the King and the Judge, all of which belonged to God.

But Moses is not content merely to be secure, for it is natural that he who best loves man should also best love God. Therefore he pleads against the least withdrawal of the Presence: he cannot rest until repeatedly assured that God will indeed go with him; he speaks as if there were no "grace" but that. There are

many people now who think it a better proof of being religious to feel either anxious or comforted about their own salvation, their election, and their going to heaven. And these would do wisely to consider how it comes to pass that the Bible first taught men to love and to follow God, and afterwards revealed to them the mysteries of the inner life and of eternity.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE VISION OF GOD.

xxxiv.

IT was when God had most graciously assured Moses of His affection, that he ventured, in so brief a cry that it is almost a gasp of longing, to ask, "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory" (xxxiii. 18).

We have seen how nobly this petition and the answer condemn all anthropomorphic misunderstandings of what had already been revealed; and also how it exemplifies the great law, that they who see most of God, know best how much is still unrevealed. The elders saw the God of Israel and did eat and drink: Moses was led from the bush to the flaming top of Sinai, and thence to the tent where the pillar of cloud was as a sentinel; but the secret remained unseen, the longing unsatisfied, and the nearest approach to the Beatific Vision reached by him with whom God spake face to face as with a friend, was to be hidden in a cleft of the rock, to be aware of an awful Shadow, and to hear the Voice of the Unseen.

It was a fit time for the proclamation which was then made. When the people had been righteously punished and yet graciously forgiven, the name of the Self-Existent expanded and grew clearer,—"Jehovah Jehovah, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow

to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation." And as Moses made haste and bowed himself, it is affecting to hear him again pleading for that beloved Presence which even yet he can scarce believe to be restored, and instead of claiming any separation through his fidelity and his honours, praying "Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thine inheritance" (xxxiv. 10).

Thereupon the covenant is given, as if newly, but without requiring its actual re-enactment; and certain of the former precepts are rehearsed, chiefly such as would guard against a relapse into idolatry when they entered the good land where God would bestow on them prosperity and conquest.

As Moses had broken the former tablets, the task was imposed on him of hewing out the slabs on which God renewed His awful sanction of the Decalogue, the fundamental statutes of the nation. And they who had failed to endure his former absence, were required to be patient while he tarried again upon the mountain, forty days and nights.

With his return a strange incident is connected. Unknown by himself, the "skin of his face shone by reason of His speaking with him," and Aaron and the people recoiled until he called to them. And thenceforth he lived a strange and isolated life. At each new interview the glory of his countenance was renewed, and when he conveyed his revelation to the people, they beheld the lofty sanction, the light of God upon his face. Then he veiled his face until next he

approached his God, so that none might see what changes came there, and whether—as St. Paul seems to teach us—the lustre gradually waned.

His revelation, the apostle argues, was like this occasional and fading gleam, while the moral glory of the Christian system has no concealments: it uses great frankness; there is nothing withdrawn, no veil upon the face. Nor is it given to one alone to behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and to share its lustre. We all, with face unveiled, share this experience of the deliverer (2 Cor. iii. 12, 18).

But the incident itself is most instructive. Since he had already spent an equal time with God, yet no such results had followed, it seems that we receive what we are adapted to receive, not straitened in Him but in our own capabilities; and as Moses, after his vehemence of intercession, his sublimity of self-negation, and his knowledge of the greater name of God, received new lustre from the unchangeable Fountain of light, so does all true service and earnest aspiration, while it approaches God, elevate and glorify humanity.

We learn also something of the exaltation of which matter is capable. We who have seen coarse bulb and soil and rain transmuted by the sunshine into radiance of bloom and subtlety of perfume, who have seen plain faces illuminated from within until they were almost angelic,—may we not hope for something great and rare for ourselves, and the beloved who are gone, as we muse upon the profound word, "It is raised a spiritual body"?

And again we learn that the best religious attainment is the least self-conscious: Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.

CHAPTERS XXXV—XL.

THE CONCLUSION.

THE remainder of the narrative sets forth in terms almost identical with the directions already given, the manner in which the Divine injunctions were obeyed. The people, purified in heart by danger, chastisement and shame, brought much more than was required. A quarter of a million would poorly represent the value of the shrine in which, at the last, Moses and Aaron approached their God, while the cloud covered the tent and the glory filled the tabernacle, and Moses failed to overcome his awe and enter.

Thenceforth the cloud was the guide of their halting and their march. Many a time they grieved their God in the wilderness, yet the cloud was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire therein by night, throughout all their journeyings.

That cloud is seen no longer; but One has said, "Lo, I am with you all the days." If the presence is less material, it is because we ought to be more spiritual.

Looking back upon the story, we can discern more clearly what was asserted when we began—the forming and training of a nation.

They are called from shameful servitude by the devotion of a patriot and a hero, who has learned in

failure and exile the difference between self-confidence and faith. The new name of God, and His remembrance of their fathers, inspire them at the same time with awe and hope and nationality. They see the hollowness of earthly force, and of superstitious worships, in the abasement and ruin of Egypt. They are taught by the Paschal sacrifice to confess that the Divine favour is a gift and not a right, that their lives also are justly forfeited. The overthrow of Pharaoh's army and the passage of the Sea brings them into a new and utterly strange life, in an atmosphere and amid scenes well calculated to expand and deepen their emotions, to develop their sense of freedom and self-respect, and yet to oblige them to depend wholly on their God. Privation at Marah chastens them. The attack of Amalek introduces them to war, and forbids their dependence to sink into abject softness. The awful scene of Horeb burns and brands his littleness into man. The covenant shows them that, however little in themselves, they may enter into communion with the Eternal. It also crushes out what is selfish and individualising, by making them feel the superiority of what they all share over anything that is peculiar to one of them. The Decalogue reveals a holiness at once simple and profound, and forms a type of character such as will make any nation great. The sacrificial system tells them at once of the pardon and the heinousness of sin. Religion is both exalted above the world and infused into it, so that all is consecrated. The priesthood and the shrine tell them of sin and pardon, exclusion and hope; but that hope is a common heritage, which none may appropriate without his brother.

The especial sanctity of a sacred calling is balanced

by an immediate assertion of the sacredness of toil, and the Divine Spirit is recognised even in the gift of handicraft.

A tragic and shameful failure teaches them, more painfully than any symbolic system of curtains and secret chambers, how little fitted they are for the immediate intercourse of heaven. And yet the ever-present cloud, and the shrine in the heart of their encampment, assure them that God is with them of a truth.

Could any better system be imagined by which to convert a slavish and superstitious multitude into a nation at once humble and pure and gallant—a nation of brothers and of worshippers, chastened by a genuine sense of ill desert and of responsibility, and yet braced and fired by the conviction of an exalted destiny?

To do this, and also to lead mankind to liberty, to rescue them from sensuous worship, and prepare them for a system yet more spiritual, to teach the human race that life is not repose but warfare, pilgrimage and aspiration, and to sow the seeds of beliefs and expectations which only an atoning Mediator and an Incarnate God could satisfy, this was the meaning of the Exodus.

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